

Volume Two of

THE PLAYS
OF
J B PRIESTLEY

By J B PRIESTLEY

Fiction

BRIGHT DAY
THE GOOD COMPANIONS
THEY WALK IN THE CITY
LET THE PEOPLE SING
BLACK OUT IN GRETLEY
THE DOOMSDAY MEN
BENIGHTED
FESTIVAL AT FARBRIDGE
THE MAGICIANS

ANGEL PAVEMENT
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FARAWAY
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EVER SINCE PARADISE

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POSTSCRIPTS

THE PLAYS
OF
J. B. PRIESTLEY

VOLUME II



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INTRODUCTION

THE plays in this volume are all comedies—although comedies of various kinds. James Agate, when called upon once to give a short list of his likes and dislikes, included my serious plays among his likes and my comedies among his dislikes. On the other hand, I know an equally distinguished man of the Theatre who greatly prefers my comedies to my serious plays. The playgoing public appears to have no preference one way or the other, and this seems to me very sensible of it, and here I applaud its sound judgment. There are some men who should never try to be funny and there are others who are least effective when they are in grim earnest. But most of us are somewhere between these two extremes. And for my part I would bitterly resent being compelled to restrict my writing for the stage to either one form or the other. On the whole I think I find it easier to plan and then to write a serious play than I do a comedy (and to this point I shall return), but I enjoy the actual staging of a comedy more than I do that of serious play, and if asked to produce one of my own plays I would certainly choose a comedy. Nor do I think it difficult to explain these preferences. There is about a serious play that is properly constructed a natural sweep forward, an inevitable progress, that makes it easier to write, so that often a big scene of considerable technical intricacy will almost write itself. But in the detailed presentation of a comic scene on the stage, where inflections and timing are all-important, I find myself more at home and happier on the job than I do with the more serious plays. And it is, of course, far easier to test the value of your work in comedy, if only because the laughter of the audience tells you what is happening.

There is, however, an important point to be made here. To my mind it is only in the broadest farce that "anything for a laugh" is legitimate. In the production of comedy this can be a very dangerous policy. Many productions of Shakespeare's comedies have been ruined for me by antics more suitable to the Crazy Gang at the Victoria Palace. The fun was there, of course, but it was not the fun that Shakespeare intended. For example, in the glorious orchard scene in *Henry IV Part Two* it is easy enough to provoke laughter by turning Shallow and Silence into knockabout buffoons, but it is equally easy in this way to ruin one of the finest scenes in all comic literature. The producer of comedy should set himself the task of discovering and then exploiting to the full the particular kind of comic effect the author intended, instead of going anywhere and

doing anything for a laugh. Falling about or throwing custard pies will always produce bigger laughs than the most adroit examples of mental absurdity. I delight in wild clowning myself, but it is delightful only in its own place. Actors are often at fault here, because, having been given a comic part, they feel that every laugh, no matter how obtained, is a personal contribution of value to the production in hand, whereas they may easily be sacrificing the whole structure and value of a scene, and any lasting impression it can make, by these dubious triumphs. Every comedy worth playing has its own particular atmosphere, flavour, and appeal, and these should not be sacrificed to the dangerous notion that "every laugh is worth five pounds." It is always possible that a few five-pound laughs may finally cost several thousands.

I have already suggested that—to me at any rate—the writing of a comedy is not as easy as pie. The point is worth making if only because more than once when a comedy of mine has been produced, some critics have told their readers in effect that I have merely been filling in a gap with a hasty bit of fooling, probably knocked off in a few days. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have usually spent far more time and trouble, done far more re-constructing and re-writing, demanded far more additional rehearsals, in the comedies than in the serious plays. To take two examples from the plays selected for this volume, which, incidentally, does not include all the comedies I have written and had produced. *When We Are Married* and *Ever Since Paradise*. During the provincial try-out of *When We Are Married* I wrote and re-wrote many scenes, and we were actually presenting one version of the play in the evenings while we were rehearsing an altered version of it during the day. *Ever Since Paradise* was first written in 1939, it was substantially re-written during the war, and then much of it was changed before it was finally produced in 1946, and even then, during its provincial tour, some scenes were re-written. The critic who was not amused is clearly at liberty to retort that the result was not worth all this labour. That is a matter of opinion. But, at the risk now of being accused of wasting my time and energy, I do firmly declare that no comedy of mine ever arrived in a London theatre as a hasty bit of fooling, to which not sufficient attention had been given.

These comedies, I repeat, are of various kinds, and I shall try to give some indication of how I see them myself in discussing the individual plays. But they all more or less fall into one large division of comedy, although that again can be easily sub-divided. These large divisions, I fancy, are High, Light and Broad. High Comedy, which has a particular appeal to Latin and Central European minds, has never been popular with English writers and audiences, though

I think we might fairly claim Somerset Maugham's *The Circle* as a successful example of this form. The preference here, especially among the stalls public, has been for Light Comedy, partly because it is a form that provides admirable vehicles for popular and highly skilled star performers, without whom these flimsy pieces are apt to look very thin indeed. (This is a fact that Repertory and amateur producers ignore at their peril.) It is a form of comedy that I do not much care about myself, and I have not included in this selection the two attempts of mine made some years ago. My own choice is Broad Comedy, which is stronger in situation and richer in its characterisation than Light Comedy, and more frankly farcical and less austere intellectually in its approach than High Comedy. It is, I believe, peculiarly suitable to the English temperament, and as I consider I possess a fairly thick slab of this temperament, this is the field of comedy in which I have chosen to work. One final point: the reader who is also a London playgoer must not confuse the real existence of these plays with their life on London playbills. Thus, the earliest of them, *Laburnum Grove*, is still being widely played, and the latest, *Ever Since Paradise*, has been produced from Stockholm to Madrid and has lately enjoyed much success throughout Central Europe.

LABURNUM GROVE This comedy of suburban life, which brought back that fine actor, Edmund Gwenn, to the stage after some years' absence in films, was originally produced at the Duchess Theatre in the autumn of 1933. It had a very long run, which I deliberately broke (for I was the management too) to send the company to New York, where the play did reasonably well. It is a great favourite with Repertory and amateur companies here, but, perhaps because it is very English in atmosphere and humour, it has not been as widely and successfully produced abroad as many of my other plays have. The droll business with the bananas, which has amused thousands of audiences and appears to remain in their memory, owes nothing to me but was a happy invention of my friend, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, who produced the play. At the time I wrote it, when I was also gathering material for *English Journey*, I was very suspicious about our financial system, if only because the banks appeared to flourish when industry was failing, and this explains certain references in the text. Frequently in the Theatre, as most people who work in it will agree, either everything goes right or everything goes wrong. With *Laburnum Grove*, which I planned in a nursing home and wrote rapidly during convalescence, everything went right. We had a good cast, headed by Edmund Gwenn and Mary Jerrold, Ethel Coleridge and Melville Cooper, and this production brought me to the Duchess

Theatre and a long and happy association with its owner, J P Mitchellhill

BEEES ON THE BOAT DECK This was an attempt to write political satire in terms of farcical comedy A few critics—I seem to remember an encouraging notice in *The Times*—saw that I was trying to do something new and rather difficult, and there were people—Humbert Wolfe was one of them—who were tremendously enthusiastic about the piece But for most people, it did not quite come off, in spite of the fact that the production, which opened, without any preliminary tour, at the Lyric in May 1936, had an astonishing cast, which included Kay Hammond, Rene Ray, Ralph Richardson, Laurence Olivier, Raymond Huntley, Richard Goolden, John Laurie, Alan Jeayes It was produced by Richardson and Olivier, who were my partners in the enterprise Some good judges have told me that we made a mistake in choosing a fairly large theatre and a big realistic set, that the symbolism of the piece demanded a different type of setting and production It has always been a favourite of mine, and I consider that one or two of its scenes contain the richest comic writing I have contrived for the stage How it reads today, I cannot imagine, for I cannot look at the text without remembering, with pleasure and with regret, the superb acting of that unusually fine cast

WHEN WE ARE MARRIED Produced at the St Martin's in October 1938, and transferred to the Prince's at the end of March 1939 It has been very popular ever since I enjoyed writing this broadly farcical comedy because I had a lot of fun remembering and then using various aspects of West Riding life and manners known to my boyhood The plot is nonsensical but the characters and their attitudes and their talk are all authentic The play was magnificently cast and produced by Basil Dean, who in my opinion has a great flair for this kind of comedy It was during the early part of its run that I had to take over, at twenty-four hours notice, the part of Henry Ormonroyd, the drunken photographer, and thus did some acting, of a sort, about which I have boasted ever since

GOOD NIGHT CHILDREN After a long provincial tour, this play arrived at the New Theatre in February 1942, but was withdrawn after a short run It has at least one admirer, and a most distinguished one, namely, James Bridie, who considers it to be among the very best of its kind, really excellent vintage nonsense The play may have all manner of faults not apparent to me, but I am certain that the chief reason why it failed to attract people in 1942 was that at that time people took their broadcasting very seriously and resented any

easy mockery of radio performers and officials. Perhaps too it is one of those pieces that are too much of a private joke, with a special appeal to an inner circle, ever to be widely popular.

THE GOLDEN FLEECE This play, which has had a curious history, has never been produced in London, because I have long felt that it would not succeed if it were produced. It was originally written just before the war and was then called *Bull Market*. I put it aside when the war came because I felt that its story of sudden vast gains in speculation would seem old-fashioned or unreal to wartime audiences, even though, as we now know, such fortunes were actually being made. But being asked to help with a new play by both the Bradford Civic Playhouse and the Glasgow Citizens Theatre, I gave both of them *Bull Market* and both of them did very well out of it. Later, after some re-writing and a change of title to *The Golden Fleece*, the play went out on tour with Betty Warren and Mervyn Johns playing the two leads, but somehow it failed to capture public interest, chiefly, I think, because audiences found the main theme incredible, and so was withdrawn. I put a great deal of work, at various times, into this play, though as a piece of writing it still remains rather rough-and-ready. I still find the story itself attractive and believe the two chief characters to be admirable playing parts, but it may well be that the film and not the Theatre is the proper medium.

HOW ARE THEY AT HOME? This topical wartime comedy was produced at the Apollo in May 1944. But it was never intended to be a contribution to the West End Theatre. It was written specially to be performed by ENSA companies to service men overseas—hence the title. I have included it here because of its wartime topical interest, and because many of the men and women who saw performances of it during their service abroad might like to have a copy of the text. Those who played in it at the Apollo—and it had an excellent cast—are not likely to forget the warnings and buzz-bombs that punctuated most performances.

EVER SINCE PARADISE This experimental comedy, as I have already explained, was originally written in 1939 and then much re-written at odd intervals. With some extremely adroit music by Dennis Arundell, with Ursula Jeans and Roger Livesey playing Helen and William (and all that that involved), in a production I directed myself, with much valuable help from Roger Livesey and Osmund Willson, *Ever Since Paradise* started on a long and very successful provincial tour in the summer of 1946. At the end of that tour there was no theatre for us in London, so we laid off the production for

six months, and then opened at the New in June 1947. I think it is true, as several knowledgeable persons have told me, that we achieved a sparkle and gaiety in the original touring production that we never quite recaptured afterwards. Nevertheless, the reception this play had in London (though it ran for several months and made many friends) was a shock and a bitter disappointment to me. To begin with, I felt that the astonishingly versatile and brilliant performances by Ursula Jeans and Roger Livesey never received the attention and the praise they deserved. And then many of the notices were not merely inadequate but downright wilfully stupid. Let me give one example. One critic who, I know from personal observation, was not even in the auditorium during the funniest scenes of the play, condemned me—in this of all plays—for solemn preaching. Being producer as well as author, I often looked in at this play, and always the audiences appeared to be having an uproariously good time (as they have done since with it in many Continental capitals), yet it is a fact that fifty per cent of the Press was sullenly hostile. And why, I cannot imagine, unless it was because I was at least trying to do something new. One final point, which brings me back to what I said earlier about my comedies in general, is that although this play, if properly produced and acted, should often have the air of being a gay charade, it was in fact written and re-written with great care and made far greater demands on such technical knowledge as I possess than any of the other plays in this volume. But it was worth the time and trouble, not only because of all the fun we and the audiences had with it, but also because here and there it seemed to me to create a new and valuable relationship between players and audience, and because it might possibly drop a hint or two to younger and more hopeful playwrights.

J B PRIESTLEY

January, 1949

LABURNUM GROVE

An Immoral Comedy in Three Acts

TO
EDMUND GWENN

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

ELSIE RADFERN
MRS (LUCY) BAXLEY
BERNARD BAXLEY
GEORGE RADFERN
HAROLD RUSS
JOE FLETTEN
MRS (DOROTHY) RADFERN
INSPECTOR STACK
SERGEANT MORRIS

ACT I

Sunday Evening

ACT II

SCENE I Early Monday Morning

SCENE II Monday Afternoon

ACT III

Monday Evening

The whole action takes place in the living-room of the Radferns' house, *Ferndale*, Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green, a suburb of North London

Laburnum Grove—Copyright, 1933, by John Boynton Priestley

"Laburnum Grove" was first produced in London on November 28th, 1933, at the Duchess Theatre with the following cast

ELSIE RADFERN	MARGERY PICKARD
Mrs (LUCY) BAXLEY	ETHEL COLERIDGE
BERNARD BAXLEY	MELVILLE COOPER
GEORGE RADFERN	EDMUND GWENN
HAROLD RUSS	FRANCIS JAMES
JOE FLETTEN	JAMES HARCOURT
MRS (DOROTHY) RADFERN	MARY JERROLD
INSPECTOR STACK	DAVID HAWTHORNE
SERGEANT MORRIS	DOUGLAS PAYNE

Produced by CEDRIC HARDWICKE

ACT I

The Scene is the living-room in the RADFERNs' house, "Ferndale", Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green—a suburb in North London. The time is Sunday evening in late summer, still daylight at first. On the back wall from right to left are a small window, then a door that can lead directly into a greenhouse, then a larger window looking out on to a back garden. In the right wall, downstage, is a door into a small hall, leading to the front door of the house and the stairs. In the left wall is a door leading into the kitchen. Against this wall, beyond the door, is a small sideboard with whisky decanter, soda syphon, and several bottles of beer on it. In the corner, between the left wall and the large window, is an oval or round table, on easy castors, that is laid for supper but is covered with two cloths. In the opposite corner is a small table on which is a telephone, and near it a loud-speaker and wireless set. There are one or two easy chairs and several dining-room chairs in the room, which is brightly, comfortably furnished in a suburban style. When the curtain rises MRS BAXLEY and ELSIE are discovered seated at a small card table in the centre. MRS BAXLEY is a woman in her forties, dressed in a smart-shabby style, a mixture of silliness and calculating selfishness. ELSIE is a pretty but rather petulant and discontented girl of twenty or so, the kind you see in the High Street of every fairly prosperous suburb. ELSIE is shuffling a pack of cards and when she has finished she cuts them into two, towards MRS BAXLEY, who then proceeds to put them together and deal them face downward on the table into six packs.

MRS BAXLEY (*as she finishes dealing the cards*) To yourself your home your wish. Have you wished, Elsie?

ELSIE Yes, auntie. Very definitely.

MRS BAXLEY What you do expect—what you don't expect and what's sure to come true. Mind you, I'm not always in the mood, you know. Sometimes I can't see things at all, and then at other times, it's all as clear as anything, and everything I tell people comes true. It's a gift, you know. One can't control it.

ELSIE (*with signs of excitement*) Well, you must be in the mood to-night, Aunt Lucy.

MRS BAXLEY Why? What's exciting you to-night? I know there's something

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ELSIE I'll tell you afterwards It would spoil it if I told you now
You must tell me things first

MRS BAXLEY All right, but I hope your mother won't come back
in the middle of it, because she doesn't like me to read the cards for
you—she told me so, the other day

ELSIE Mother won't be back from Mrs Repington's until after
supper That's why she got supper all ready (*indicating table in corner*)
before she went So you needn't worry about her

MRS BAXLEY All right then

*Picks up first lot of cards and examines them, and does the same
with succeeding lots throughout the speeches that follow She
assumes the usual far-away mystical air of the clairvoyant, which
is in sharp and comic contrast to her tone and manner when making
remarks not directly concerned with the fortune-telling*

MRS BAXLEY Um Um Well, the first thing I see, Elsie,
is a great surprise Yes, you're going to have a great surprise

ELSIE A surprise? When?

MRS BAXLEY Very soon

ELSIE How soon? Next week?

MRS BAXLEY Perhaps sooner

ELSIE Well, it can't be much sooner It's Sunday night and nearly
next week now

MRS BAXLEY Well, it's coming very soon And it isn't a nice
surprise I don't think you'll like it

ELSIE (*reproachfully*) Oh—Aunt Lucy!

MRS BAXLEY I can't help it I'm only telling you what's here in
the cards

ELSIE What's it about?

MRS BAXLEY (*brooding over more cards*) I think it's something to
do with a medium-coloured man

ELSIE (*thinking hard*) A medium-coloured man? Is he young?

MRS BAXLEY No, I don't think he is Your home comes into it

ELSIE (*disappointed*) Oh!

MRS BAXLEY Yes, I think the medium-coloured man must be
your father

ELSIE Is it—is it about an engagement?

MRS BAXLEY No, I don't see an engagement connected with it
I think you're simply going to get a great surprise from your father

ELSIE (*disgusted*) That's just like the cards They're always like
that A great surprise—from Dad—of all people! I suppose the great

surprise will be that he's grown two tomatoes in his greenhouse Or they're going to play Handel's Largo for him on the wireless Or he can't find his pipe or one of his silly detective stories or something Dad!

MRS BAXLEY Well, it's all here—quite plain

ELSIE Perhaps you're not in the mood to-night, auntie

MRS BAXLEY (*coldly*) As a matter of fact, I am seeing very clearly to-night But it was you who asked me to read the cards, Elsie, and if you don't choose to accept what I see, I'll stop

ELSIE No Sorry Go on

MRS BAXLEY (*examining more cards*) Also a great surprise for two people staying in your house And they're going to leave quite soon

ELSIE That must be you and Uncle Bernard You're the only people staying in the house, besides Dad and Mother and me

MRS BAXLEY (*not pleased at this*) Humph! Very queer I can't imagine what surprise we'll get and anyhow we hadn't thought of leaving you yet and nothing's been said about our going Humph! Perhaps I'm not getting it right after all

ELSIE Go on Tell me some more

MRS BAXLEY (*examining last lots of cards*) You're going to travel And quite soon

ELSIE (*excitedly*) I'm not, am I?

MRS BAXLEY You are It's all here A journey Strange beds Crossing water And it'll come as a great surprise This isn't the same surprise as the other, though That's quite different You're going on a long journey very soon, across water

ELSIE It sounds too good to be true You're not just making this up to please me, are you?

MRS BAXLEY (*on her dignity*) Certainly not I never make up anything to please anybody

ELSIE Then it's just the cards again They call anything a long journey, just to make it exciting They've had me before like that They tell you about a journey and crossing water and a strange bed and a fair woman and a dark man until you think you're in for something marvellously exciting, and then it turns out you're going to spend the night at Aunt Florrie's at Sydenham I'll believe in this long journey when I see it I'll bet it turns out to be like that great surprise from the medium-coloured man—just something dull about Dad

MRS BAXLEY (*putting the cards together*) Next time you'd better tell your own fortune I've told you all I could see

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ELSIE But you've missed the really important thing Wasn't there anything about an engagement for me?

MRS BAXLEY Not a sign of one

ELSIE (*triumphantly*) Well, that's where they're wrong—and it just shows you—because I'm really engaged now, and I'll be properly engaged to-night

MRS BAXLEY Engaged! Well, I am surprised

ELSIE You don't sound very pleasantly surprised, Aunt Lucy

MRS BAXLEY If you must know, I'm not

ELSIE Why?

MRS BAXLEY Because I think you're too young to be engaged

ELSIE I'm not too young I'm twenty

MRS BAXLEY Well, what's twenty You're not old enough to know your own mind

ELSIE Yes, I am I don't see what age has got to do with knowing your own mind I've always been old enough to know my own mind

MRS BAXLEY That's what you think Is it that young man who was here the other night?

ELSIE Yes, Harold Russ And I'm bringing him here to supper to-night and he's going to ask Dad

MRS BAXLEY Funny time to come, isn't it, when he's had all day to do it in?

ELSIE He couldn't help it He's been helping a friend of his to sell second-hand cars, and he had to take a man out in one of them to-night He wants to start in the second-hand car business for himself, when he gets some capital

MRS BAXLEY Well, I can tell you one thing, Elsie Your Dad doesn't like him much

ELSIE I know that But then Dad doesn't really know him And you know what Dad is If Harold was as dull as ditchwater and lived here in Laburnum Grove or somewhere in Shooters Green, and went into the City in the morning and came home at night and potted about in a greenhouse, Dad would think he was marvellous But just because Harold's smart and wants to get on and once laughed at Laburnum Grove and Shooters Green—

Enter BERNARD BAXLEY, a rather glossy, shifty fellow in his forties, always either over-confident or uneasy

MRS BAXLEY Well, I don't see anything to laugh at

BAXLEY Who's laughing at what?

ELSIE I'm talking about Harold Russ, uncle

BAXLEY Oh—your boy friend who was here the other night

ELSIE Yes Dad doesn't like him because he once made fun of Laburnum Grove here and Shooters Green

MRS BAXLEY And I see nothing to laugh at It's a very nice, respectable, refined neighbourhood

ELSIE That's just it It's all so deadly dull, all slippers and green-houses Nothing ever happens except that the people at *Ben Machree* have bought a new car or the woman at *Heather Brow* is going to have a baby

MRS BAXLEY Well, wait until you're going to have a baby, you'll find it exciting enough

BAXLEY Ah—Elsie's like me She doesn't care for this ultra-respectable, humdrum, suburban sort of existence I don't mind paying it a visit—like this—just while I'm wondering what to do next, but I couldn't live in it I want life There's no life here What is there here for a man who's been out East?

MRS BAXLEY (*emphatically*) I can tell you what there is for a woman who's been out East—three decent meals a day and a good night's sleep

BAXLEY Yes, but Lucy, you never got into the life out there

MRS BAXLEY Well, you didn't seem sorry to get out of it

ELSIE Well, I agree with Uncle Bernard And I know Harold does too Oh—what time is it?

BAXLEY Just after nine

ELSIE I promised to meet him at the Tube station in ten minutes I must fly (*Hurries out*)

BAXLEY What's on?

MRS BAXLEY She's got herself engaged to that chap, and she's bringing him here so that he can ask George's permission

BAXLEY Oh—that's it, is it?

MRS BAXLEY Yes, and another thing What he's after is borrowing some money from George to set him up in the second-hand car business

BAXLEY How do you know?

MRS BAXLEY I don't know But it's a good guess—from something that Elsie let drop Besides, that chap wouldn't bother asking her father's permission if he wasn't after something

BAXLEY Well, how does that affect us?

MRS BAXLEY Did you see that man——?

BAXLEY Simpson? Yes And they won't look at me unless I can

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put down four hundred and fifty pounds, and they only give me until Wednesday

MRS BAXLEY Then the sooner we ask for that four hundred and fifty pounds the better

BAXLEY Shall I do it direct through him or had you better try and work it through Dorothy?

MRS BAXLEY Not through Dorothy

BAXLEY Why not? After all, she's your sister

MRS BAXLEY Yes, but I think she's getting a bit fed-up with us We've been here nearly a fortnight this time, and it's the third time we've stayed with them during this last year And she knows you've been borrowing pretty freely from George How much have you had out of him now?

BAXLEY Well, you know

MRS BAXLEY (*grimly*) Oh no, I don't I only know about the amounts you've mentioned to me, that's all

BAXLEY Well, that's all there's been

MRS BAXLEY And the rest!

BAXLEY There might be—perhaps ten bob here and there—just something and nothing

MRS BAXLEY Too many somethings and nothings Dorothy may be my sister and easy-going as a rule, but I think she's had about enough She's been rather sharp with both of us, I've noticed, these last few days So you try George himself He's good-natured enough for anything

BAXLEY So he ought to be Nothing to worry about Just stuck in the one business and let it keep him Money for nothing You've only got to look at him to see that it must be money for nothing He doesn't know he's born

MRS BAXLEY He ought to be married to you for a bit and then he would

BAXLEY All right, all right The point is, are we going to try him to-night?

MRS BAXLEY We'd better try him now, before Elsie's darling Harold begins borrowing

BAXLEY Is Dorothy in?

MRS BAXLEY No, she's visiting a friend of hers, Mrs Repington, and she won't be back until after supper So now's the time

BAXLEY He's out there in the greenhouse, I suppose?

MRS BAXLEY Yes, call him in.

BAXLEY Half a minute I haven't worked out the tactics yet Might be a good idea to sort of take a high hand with him After all, I've seen the world, I've been somewhere, I've done something, and he hasn't Now suppose I——

MRS BAXLEY Suppose you just call him in and get done with it And if you won't, I will

She goes towards door at back and calls

George, George

RADFERN (*off, at back*) All right Just coming

He enters through the door at the back He is a man about fifty with nothing remarkable about his appearance, though even at the first there should be a certain quiet assurance and authority visible beneath his easy manner At this hour, he is very much the suburban householder at ease, wearing slippers and an old coat, and smoking a pipe He is carrying two small tomatoes in one hand, and he displays these with an air of humorous triumph

RADFERN (*holding out tomatoes*) Look at these What more do you want? All fresh

MRS BAXLEY Charming They look very nice, George Won't you sit down?

RADFERN Beautiful tomatoes The Special Radfern brand Apply Ferndale Nurseries, Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green (*Looking round*) But I thought supper was ready

MRS BAXLEY No I called you in, George, because we just wanted to have a word with you while we're by ourselves

RADFERN Oh—I see Well? (*A pause*)

MRS BAXLEY (*impatiently*) Go on, Bernard

BAXLEY It's like this, old man I've just seen this chap Simpson I mentioned to you the other day Only time I could see him, because he's out of London all the week I think I told you the other day—it's a marvellous opportunity

RADFERN Doesn't sound like one to me When there isn't much business, I don't see that you're going to sell a lot of business supplies

BAXLEY You are with these things I've worked all that out, old man Trust me But the point is this, they say I can have that agency—exclusive agency—if I put down four hundred and fifty pounds

RADFERN Put it down?

BAXLEY Just put it down, that's all, old man These people don't need the money, but their agent has to put down four hundred and fifty pounds

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

RADFERN But you haven't got four hundred and fifty pounds, have you, Bernard?

BAXLEY Of course I haven't I haven't been as lucky as you have, old man

RADFERN How do you know I've been lucky?

MRS BAXLEY He doesn't know That's only his silly way of talking, George We all know you've worked hard for your money

BAXLEY Certainly I never suggested you hadn't And I know you've lent me a bit already, George

RADFERN (*good-humouredly*) About two hundred and fifty pounds, I think, Bernard

BAXLEY Which you'll get back, of course

MRS BAXLEY Of course

BAXLEY But what we feel is that if you'd simply let me have this four hundred and fifty to put down——

MRS BAXLEY You see, it's a wonderful chance for Bernard

BAXLEY And I thought I'd come straight to you instead of going to Dorothy, even if she is Lucy's sister

RADFERN Quite right We can keep Dorothy out of this As a matter of fact, she doesn't know you owe me two hundred and fifty already

MRS BAXLEY (*butterfly*) And she's not the only one

BAXLEY Well, I don't like dragging women into these things And I know George doesn't Well, what about it, old man?

RADFERN (*musingly*) Four hundred and fifty You know, it's quite a bit of money, Bernard I'll have to think about it

BAXLEY There isn't much time, and I don't want to lose the chance

RADFERN I quite understand that, old man, but four hundred and fifty on top of the two hundred and fifty you've had already is quite a lot of money—(*Who has strolled towards the back, suddenly turning*) Look here, ask me again after supper, and I'll give you an answer

He goes out BAXLEY and MRS BAXLEY watch him go, then look at one another, raising their eyebrows

MRS BAXLEY What do you think?

BAXLEY That'll be all right After supper, over a drink or two, I'll be able to touch him

MRS BAXLEY Yes, but what about this chap of Elsie's?

BAXLEY He'll have gone then

MRS. BAXLEY Listen, if they want to be alone with him *before* supper, it's better for us than if they wait

BAXLEY That's right Leave 'em to it, then After all, I got in first

MRS BAXLEY This sounds like them

Voices heard outside Enter ELSIE, looking very bright She is followed by HAROLD RUSS, not bad-looking and smartly dressed, but with nothing in him In twenty years' time he will look and behave exactly like BAXLEY

ELSIE (*happy and excited*) Harold, this is my Aunt Lucy and my Uncle Bernard But you've all met before, haven't you?

MRS BAXLEY (*smiling very falsely*) Yes Last Tuesday, I think it was What a lovely day it's been, hasn't it?

HAROLD Yes, hasn't it? I've seen a lot of it, too Been taking a fellow round in a car, trying to sell it to him

BAXLEY Any luck?

HAROLD Shouldn't be surprised

BAXLEY How *is* business?

HAROLD Not too good How are things with you?

BAXLEY Well, just now—I'm—er—looking round

HAROLD Oh—yes I remember you telling me, the other night Been out East, haven't you?

BAXLEY That's right Malay States Singapore chiefly Wish I'd never come back It's a man's life out there—even yet, a man's life Isn't it, Lucy?

MRS BAXLEY (*tartly*) I don't know about a man's life I know it isn't a woman's life

BAXLEY She wanted to get back, you see And I thought I'd give the Old Country another chance

ELSIE I'd love to travel So would you, wouldn't you, Harold?

HAROLD Wouldn't mind I knock up and down a bit, you know

BAXLEY And now you're going to pop the question to Dad, eh?

HAROLD Hello, who's been telling you?

BAXLEY (*fatuously*) Never mind, but we know (*To MRS BAXLEY*) Don't we?

MRS BAXLEY (*with ferocious parody of him*) Yes, we know.

BAXLEY And if you two want us to leave you to it, just say the word

ELSIE All right Thanks But I think we'll wait a bit

MRS BAXLEY (*with dignity*) If a proper opportunity presents itself—

THE PLAYS OF J E PRIESTLEY

RADFERN *appears in doorway at back, carrying another tomato*

HAROLD Good evening, Mr Radfern

RADFERN Oh—good evening And there's another one (*indicating tomatoes*), making three Do for supper

ELSIE (*to MRS BAXLEY*) You see, auntie That's the surprise in the fortune What did I tell you? Dad and his three tomatoes

RADFERN (*pointing to cards on table*) Oh—you've been telling fortunes again, have you? Don't you know it's unlucky to read the cards on Sunday?

MRS BAXLEY That's just superstition

RADFERN Of course it is But then it's all superstition, isn't it, and you might as well be thoroughly superstitious while you're at it Well, what do the cards say to-night?

MRS BAXLEY A great surprise for Elsie And she's going on a long journey quite soon

HAROLD Oh?

ELSIE (*smiling at him*) Well, I wouldn't mind

RADFERN Anywhere but Laburnum Grove and Shooters Green, eh?

ELSIE No, not anywhere But somewhere exciting

BAXLEY I know what you want You go——

RADFERN (*chiming in hastily*) Out East And I said it first, Bernard

ELSIE Everybody's so smug and settled down and dull here, and so pleased with themselves

RADFERN Well, why shouldn't they be pleased with themselves? They've got nice peaceful homes——

ELSIE (*bitterly*) Yes, and greenhouses and wireless sets

RADFERN (*good-humouredly*) Well, what do you want us to have—elephants and tigers and a scenic railway?

ELSIE Yes—but it's all so—so——

HAROLD (*loftily*) Suburban

ELSIE Yes—suburban

RADFERN That's all right to me When your mother and I came here, we thought we'd got somewhere That's why we were so pleased with ourselves and ready to live a nice quiet life

BAXLEY That's all right for you, George You've always led that sort of life But give me—adventure

MRS BAXLEY (*bitterly*) Oh—and since when?

HAROLD I know what he means I'm just the same

ELSIE I am too

RADFERN Well, I'm not You know, you don't get this sort of life handed to you on a plate

ELSIE What do you mean, Dad?

RADFERN I mean this Though you get all this handed to you on a plate—given, free, gratis, and for nothing—I don't And (*pointing outside*) he doesn't and he doesn't

BAXLEY (*staring fatuously*) Who doesn't?

ELSIE I don't see what you're driving at

RADFERN Now listen Here's Shooters Green, one of North London's newest suburbs Very clean, very respectable, bright as a new pin Nice little shops in the High Street *Yes, Madam, shall I send it? Certainly, Madam* Tea rooms Picture palaces *Good morning, Mrs Robinson Good evening Mr Johnson* And here's Laburnum Grove, one of its best roads, very quiet, very select, best type of semi-detached villas *Ben Machree Craig Y Don Mon Repos* All nations, you see *Heather Brow*—though there isn't any heather for miles around And us—*Ferndale* Nice little houses Nice people Quiet, respectable No scandals No brokers' men No screams in the night Morris Oxfords, little greenhouses, wireless sets

ELSIE (*rather bitterly*) That's it You know it all right, Dad

HAROLD Gosh—yes!

RADFERN (*good-humouredly*) Yes, I know it But you don't You're like somebody who thinks that buns grow on trees You don't know the world Because all this has been handed to you on a plate, you think it's been handed to everybody else—

BAXLEY Well, hasn't it?

RADFERN No There are chaps who've sweated their guts out so they could settle down here And God knows what they've risked—some of 'em You don't know where they've been or what they've done

BAXLEY (*with suggestion of contempt*) Well, George, I hope nobody shoots you to-morrow morning on your way to the City I haven't noticed you running many risks

RADFERN Oh—me Well, of course I'm different

BAXLEY You've been lucky

MRS BAXLEY I'm sure George has always worked hard, even if he has been safe and comfortable in his own business

ELSIE (*looking at her*) Er—

MRS BAXLEY (*taking the hint*) Yes Come on, Bernard

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

BAXLEY What for? (*As she glares at him*) Oh—yes Certainly
They both go out

RADFERN (*staring after them*) What's the matter with those two?

ELSIE They're leaving us alone because they know we want to talk to you

RADFERN I see

HAROLD It's like this, Mr Radfern—Elsie and I——

ELSIE Dad, we're engaged

HAROLD Well, we want to be

RADFERN I see (*To ELSIE*) Have you told your mother yet?

ELSIE No, I'll tell her when she comes in, after supper

HAROLD Naturally I wanted to talk to you about it

RADFERN Quite so

HAROLD We'd like to get married very soon

RADFERN What on?

HAROLD Well, that's the point Of course I'd like to get a bit more settled first

RADFERN Let me see, aren't you helping a friend of yours to sell second-hand cars just now?

HAROLD (*loftily*) Yes Of course that's just while I'm looking round

RADFERN Ah—you're looking round, are you? Like your Uncle Bernard, Elsie He's great on looking round

ELSIE (*impatiently*) Oh, Harold, why don't you talk to him properly The point is, Dad, we're engaged—and Harold knows of a second-hand car business he could buy if he only had some capital——

RADFERN Not four hundred and fifty pounds, by any chance, is it?

HAROLD Well, it could be more and it could be a bit less I can give you the figures

RADFERN (*stopping him*) Not just now I asked if it was four hundred and fifty pounds because that seems to be the popular amount to-night

Front door bell rings loudly

ELSIE Oh—bother! Who can that be?

RADFERN Probably Joe Fletten I expected him to look in this evening

ELSIE (*petulantly*) Why does he want to come here at this time?

He'll be coming in the middle of the night to ask about his greenhouse soon

RADFERN I shouldn't be surprised Well, just let him in (ELSIE goes out) It looks as if we'll have to postpone this little talk

HAROLD That's all right We could talk it over after supper perhaps

RADFERN Yes, perhaps we could But it seems to me I'm going to be rather busy after supper to-night By the way, you've never thought of becoming an agent for business supplies, have you?

HAROLD Not my line But I do know a car when I see one And there's a business there just waiting to be picked up——

RADFERN If only you can put some money down Just put it down, eh?

HAROLD That's all it amounts to You see——

RADFERN (*stopping him*) After supper

Enter ELSIE, followed by FLETTEN, a rather loud, jovial, middle-aged man, somewhat lower in the social scale than anybody we have met here so far He carries his hat

FLETTEN Good evening, Mr Radfern

RADFERN Good evening, Joe Thought you might be looking in

FLETTEN (*to HAROLD*) Good evening Seen you before here, haven't I?

HAROLD (*rather sulkily*) I believe so Good evening

FLETTEN Sorry to be so late, Mr Radfern But that greenhouse of mine's giving me a lot of trouble, and I just wanted a tip or two about——

RADFERN (*hastily*) About your tomato plants Come on then, I'll show you how I manage them (*Moves towards door at back*)

FLETTEN (*as he follows*) Shan't keep you a minute (*Jovially to ELSIE and HAROLD*) This greenhouse business is a terrible hobby, I give you my word Keeps you busy all the time, all the time

They go out

HAROLD (*softly, grumbling*) I hope that chap's not going to stay for hours

ELSIE (*going over to him*) No, he won't stay long But he's an awful old nuisance, though Comes here two or three times a week now, to look at Dad's greenhouse Oh—Harold—I hope it'll be all right

HAROLD Well, it ought to be Only—I don't think your father likes me much

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

ELSIE He will when he gets to know you better He's just a bit stupid, that's all

HAROLD And I don't know that I'm very keen on *him*

ELSIE Oh—Dad's all right when you know him He's dull, but he's rather nice, and he'll always do anything for me It's mother I'm frightened of Dad's easy

Door into house opens and MRS BAXLEY peeps into the room

MRS BAXLEY Oh—all alone?

ELSIE (*not too pleased*) Yes, you can come in (*As she comes in, leaving the door open behind her*) Mr Fletten called and Dad's gone back into the greenhouse with him

MRS BAXLEY Can't imagine what your Dad sees in that man Common, I call him

HAROLD Yes, looks like a bookie's clerk

MRS BAXLEY (*with dignity*) I've never seen a bookie's clerk (*BAXLEY looks in*) All right, Bernard, you needn't stand there looking so silly You can come in (*He does*) I wonder if we could get ready for supper now

BAXLEY That's a good idea!

ELSIE Yes, why not?

MRS BAXLEY I was only thinking that if supper was here, all ready, your father might take it into his head to ask that Mr Fletten to stay, and we don't want that, do we?

ELSIE Good Lord, no!

HAROLD No, don't let's have anybody else, if we can help it

BAXLEY Hear, hear!

ELSIE But he won't stay, he never does We can risk it

MRS BAXLEY Come on then, Bernard Don't just sit there

He, MRS BAXLEY and ELSIE move the table forward, removing the small table with the cards on it, and take off the cloths ELSIE can go into the kitchen for something, and BAXLEY can be putting the beer or whisky from the sideboard on to the table HAROLD should stand up looking on in a rather lofty fashion

Why your Dad won't have a servant in the house, I can't imagine He can well afford it

BAXLEY Two or three, I should think

ELSIE It's one of his little fads Mother doesn't mind She and the char do it easily—with my help

MRS BAXLEY (*sarcastically*) I'm glad you said—with *your help*

ELSIE It's not my fault I'm kept at home, pretending to help mother, instead of going out to work I'd much rather go out to work

BAXLEY They're coming in

Enter RADFERN and FLETTEN The supper table, now in the centre of the room, is being laid for five people The meal consists of slices of ham and tongue, cold potatoes, stewed fruit and custard, bread and butter To drink—whisky, beer and a jug of lemonade During this period of the action, the light can be going rapidly

FLETTEN (jovially) Well, well, the feast is spread

RADFERN Have a bite with us, Joe?

FLETTEN (moving towards door into house) No, thank you, Mr Radfern Must be getting along I'll look in to-morrow night, then

RADFERN (following him) Do Any time after eight

FLETTEN (turning as he reaches door, to MRS BAXLEY) Nice weather we're having, isn't it? I should think it is Good night, all Good night

The others murmur 'good night' RADFERN follows him out

MRS BAXLEY (softly but with energy) He made me jump—with his nice weather! Common, I call him

BAXLEY (quoting) *The feast is spread* That's a way to talk Any-one would think he had never seen anybody laying a supper table before

MRS BAXLEY Perhaps he hasn't

BAXLEY Never seen the world, that's his trouble

ELSIE Oh, he's just one of Dad's silly old men If it wasn't for the greenhouse he wouldn't come here

MRS BAXLEY Well, if he's what you get when you keep green-houses I'm glad I don't keep one

ELSIE (softly) Harold—remember You must get Dad's answer to-night

HAROLD Yes, I know, I know

MRS BAXLEY And Bernard, don't forget—after supper

BAXLEY Leave it to me

Enter RADFERN, who switches on lights at door It is essential that the supper table should be brilliantly lit

RADFERN (heartily) Let's have some light on the subject And plenty of it (Comes forward) Supper ready? Good! Look at those tomatoes Home grown on the premises They absolutely light up the table

MRS BAXLEY If that's how you can go on about three tomatoes,

I'm glad you don't grow pineapples I don't know what would happen then

RADFERN (*looks at supper table*) Ham, tongue, salad Beer Everything in its place and just what I wanted Let's get started Come on, everybody

They seat themselves in this order RADFERN full facing the audience, ELSIE on one side of him, MRS BAXLEY on the other, then HAROLD next to ELSIE, and BAXLEY next to MRS BAXLEY RADFERN helps them to meat, and they help themselves to salad and potatoes, making a few conventional remarks in the bustle But when the dialogue begins, they are all quietly attentive

BAXLEY This ham looks good, George

RADFERN (*heartily*) I expect it *is* good, Bernard You know, I don't think there's a meal in the week I enjoy more than Sunday night supper, and I couldn't tell you why Unless it's all so nice and peaceful

ELSIE (*with a touch of contempt*) You're all for it being nice and peaceful, aren't you, Dad?

RADFERN (*with mock humility*) I'm afraid I am I'm not like you folks

MRS BAXLEY Don't count me with them I don't want any adventures I want to see a regular income arriving

HAROLD We'd all like that

RADFERN (*faintly sardonic*) Yes, I believe you would But it's not so easy these days

BAXLEY (*with loud complacency*) It's not so easy if you're straight That's the point I like money as much as the next man, but it's got to be clean money

HAROLD (*in the same strain*) Of course I'm just the same Won't touch it if it isn't straight.

MRS BAXLEY Good gracious! I should think not

BAXLEY I've had chances of the other kind—packets of it——

RADFERN (*ironically*) No, Bernard, have you really?

BAXLEY I have, George But I've always turned it down Tainted money Wouldn't touch it

HAROLD Wouldn't touch it with a barge pole I've had my chances too—you get them in our business—but I'm the same as you—wouldn't look at queer money

ELSIE And I hope you never will, Harold

HAROLD Of course I shan't

BAXLEY (*sententiously*) It's the only thing to do, whatever happens—keep straight

RADFERN Well, I'm glad to hear you fellows feel like that I used to feel like it myself in the old days

ELSIE What do you mean, Dad—in the old days?

RADFERN I mean, in the days when I used to be in the wholesale paper trade

BAXLEY But you're still in the wholesale paper trade

RADFERN How do you know I am?

BAXLEY I've always understood you were

RADFERN Well, I'm not Haven't been in it for several years

BAXLEY But the firm's there and the office——?

RADFERN Oh, I keep them going, but that's just a blind Pass the mustard, will you, Elsie

ELSIE But I never knew you'd changed your business

RADFERN No? I don't think this ham's as nice as the last I must tell your mother about it, Elsie

ELSIE But listen, Dad—does Mother know you're not in the paper business any more?

RADFERN No, she doesn't And I don't want a word of any of this repeated to her She's a bit old-fashioned in some ways and it might give her a shock You can ask me any questions you like, and I'll answer 'em truthfully But not a word to her If you can't promise that, we'll change the subject

HAROLD and ELSIE (*together*) I promise

MRS BAXLEY So do I

BAXLEY All right to me

RADFERN Honest to God? (*They murmur agreement*) That's settled then Not a word to her Now what is it you'd like to know?

ELSIE Dad, when did you leave your old business?

RADFERN Do you remember that about four or five years ago we were very hard up?

ELSIE Was it the year when we didn't go away for the holidays?

RADFERN It was We were on enough rocks without going to the seaside We might easily have been sold up Well, that was when I finished with the wholesale paper trade

HAROLD What happened?

RADFERN Oh, I'd struggled with the business ever since I came back from the war. Slaved at it Then the slump came More slavery But we had a good little connection in the fine-quality trade And

somebody wanted that, a big firm They made me an offer I didn't like it or the chap who made it I turned it down, so this big firm did me in—never mind how—but they did They won all right Clever chap that, he's been knighted since—the dirty swine

BAXLEY And then—what?

RADFERN Well, having given honesty a fair chance, I thought I'd try the other thing

MRS BAXLEY The *other thing*?

RADFERN Yes

MRS BAXLEY You don't mean—dishonesty?

RADFERN I do

BAXLEY You're pulling our legs

RADFERN Certainly not

MRS BAXLEY Then you are going to tell me you're deliberately dishonest?

RADFERN That's what I am telling you

ELSIE But Dad, it's ridiculous You're talking as if you were a crook

RADFERN (*nonchalantly*) Well, I am a crook

MRS BAXLEY A crook!

RADFERN Yes, a crook A criminal An enemy of society

They all stare at him open-mouthed ELSIE recovers first

ELSIE (*getting up*) Dad, you're being funny

BAXLEY Course he is That'll do now, George We've bought it

RADFERN (*with quiet earnestness*) I'm perfectly serious, Bernard This isn't a joke Have a little more salad, Elsie?

ELSIE (*staring at him, faltering*) No thanks, Dad I—don't feel very hungry

RADFERN Now come along, none of that Never let anything put you off your food—that's one of my mottoes What do you say, Harold?

HAROLD (*dazed*) Yes—Mr Radfern—I should think—that's a good idea

MRS BAXLEY (*solemnly*) George Radfern, you don't look like a crook to me

RADFERN Yes, but you can't judge by appearances Why do you think Joe Fletten comes here?

MRS BAXLEY You mean that man who comes to talk to you about greenhouses?

RADFERN You must be innocent if you think that Joe Fletten knows anything about greenhouses You've only got to look at him to see he's no gardener

MRS BAXLEY I suppose he's a crook too?

RADFERN Of course he is Very old hand, Joe He works under me in the same organisation (To MRS BAXLEY) Have a little more tongue?

MRS BAXLEY (*faintly*) I can't eat what I've got

ELSIE Dad, do you really mean all this?

RADFERN Of course I mean it Every penny that's come into this house for the last few years has been dishonestly earned

BAXLEY My God!

RADFERN (*coolly*) Tainted money You've eaten it and drunk it and it's clothed you and housed you and taken you to the pictures and sent you to the seaside If I'd gone on trying to make an honest living, I don't know where you'd have been now, Elsie As it is, look at us So nicely off that Harold here—and your Uncle Bernard here—are both hoping I'll lend them several hundred pounds each, on very doubtful security

HAROLD Here, I say——

ELSIE But Dad, what do you do?

MRS BAXLEY Do you *burgle* places?

RADFERN Burgle places! Certainly not Do I look as if I burgled places?

MRS BAXLEY No, you don't But then you don't look like a crook at all to me

ELSIE (*appealingly*) You're not Are you, Dad?

RADFERN I've told you—I am And one slip—just one slip, that's all—and I'd be for it

MRS BAXLEY (*awed*) Prison!

RADFERN Yes, and a good long spell of it too

ELSIE (*looking at him in awe and terror*) Dad!

BAXLEY But look here, George, what do you do?

RADFERN Well, you might describe it as a private policy of inflation

ELSIE I don't know what that means

MRS BAXLEY Neither do I

ELSIE Do you, Harold?

RADFERN I'm ready for a little of that stewed fruit now, Elsie Let's put these plates on the side (*Makes a move*)

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ELSIE (*hastily*) No, let me do it, Dad

MRS BAXLEY Stewed fruit!

RADFERN That's it, stewed fruit What about it?

MRS BAXLEY This is no time for stewed fruit

RADFERN Yes, of course it is When do you want it?

BAXLEY She doesn't mean that, old man As a matter of fact, she's very fond of stewed fruit

RADFERN Good, and mind you, this is real garden rhubarb

MRS BAXLEY I don't want garden rhubarb—I want the truth

RADFERN All right, Lucy, you shall have the truth, and garden rhubarb and custard too, if you like it

MRS BAXLEY Custard!

ELSIE *puts the used plates on the sideboard and then begins serving the fruit and custard*

BAXLEY But what about this inflation business?

RADFERN Ah, that Well, a lot of people think this depression in trade is chiefly due to the fact that there isn't enough money in circulation Like playing a game with counters and finding you haven't got enough counters to go round Our organisation—my associates and myself—have been quietly busy these last few years trying to remedy this unhappy state of things It started in America—forging and counterfeiting bonds and notes—and then developed here, but just lately the American end has been doing badly, almost stopped But we're doing quite nicely here, and sometimes I think that things in England would have been worse if it hadn't been for us In fact you might say we've been doing our bit

BAXLEY (*dazed*) Forging and counterfeiting bonds and notes!

HAROLD (*awed*) My hat!

RADFERN (*blandly*) Very interesting work It begins as an art and ends as a profitable business

ELSIE But is it—serious?

HAROLD Is it *serious*!

RADFERN One of the most serious crimes in the calendar, Elsie You see, the banks don't like it, and what the banks don't like must be a serious crime nowadays, like blasphemy in the middle ages

ELSIE And you're mixed up in it?

RADFERN I'm engaged in it, not mixed up in it I was able to join the organisation at first because I happened to have a supply of the right sort of paper Since then I've been on the staff My job now is distribution. That's what takes me away, of course I'm off to Birmingham early to-morrow morning

MRS BAXLEY What, you're going to Birmingham on this crooked work?

RADFERN Why not? If I can do it in London, I can do it in Birmingham There's nothing peculiarly sacred about Birmingham, is there?

ELSIE But are the police really after you?

BAXLEY Don't be silly, Elsie They must be It's a terribly serious crime, forging bonds and counterfeiting notes

RADFERN (*calmly*) I should think we've given Scotland Yard it's biggest and most worrying case for years After us! They're after us Detectives, police, bank officials, magistrates, judges, the Treasury, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force We haven't even the League of Nations on our side

BAXLEY But I don't see how you've managed to go on so long without being found out

RADFERN Partly luck, partly good management Of course you can't really tell what's happening on the other side They may have got the net out, and it may be closing in on us now

Telephone bell rings, very sharp and loud

ELSIE (*with a little scream*) Oh—what's that?

She rises, MRS BAXLEY half rises, and HAROLD pushes his chair back

RADFERN (*coolly*) That's the telephone I'll answer it Have you got a bit of cheese there for me? (*Goes to telephone*) Hello! No I'm not Well, I can't help it You've got the wrong number (*Comes back from telephone*) Wants to know if I'm the North London Dogs Hospital

ELSIE Oh—it gave me such a fright

RADFERN Well, I'm sorry, but after all you wanted a bit of excitement, didn't you?

BAXLEY (*solemnly*) George, that might have been somebody who was after you, tracking you down

HAROLD Yes, it might

RADFERN And then again, it might not If tracking people down consists of ringing them up and asking if they're the Dogs Hospital, we could all be Sherlock Holmeses

ELSIE (*eagerly*) And after all, I don't suppose they'd think of looking for crooks of any kind in a place like Shooters Green

RADFERN Oh—yes, they would They haven't your ideas, Elsie People who break the law have got to live somewhere, and why not in Shooters Green and Laburnum Grove? They took away that—

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solicitor who used to live at *Stella Maris* and gave him a couple of years That was a start Probably there are one or two more of us in Laburnum Grove who'll have to go yet

HAROLD *pushes his chair well back and rises*

Hello, what's the matter?

HAROLD (*muttering*) I must be going

ELSIE (*disappointed*) Harold!

HAROLD I'm sorry but I must be going

RADFERN (*smoothly*) What about that little talk we were going to have? Another time, eh?

ELSIE (*moving round to him*) But, Harold, you can't go like this

HAROLD (*muttering*) I'm sorry, but it's getting late and I'm feeling very tired—

He moves towards the door ELSIE *intercepts him, and puts a hand on his arm*

ELSIE Oh—but Harold

HAROLD (*releasing himself and suddenly raising his voice in a rather hysterical manner*) Leave me alone I tell you I've got to go Good night

He hurries out and she follows him The other three watch them, and then stare at the door After a moment the outer door is heard to bang Then ELSIE, *looking tearful, opens the door and stands in the doorway*

MRS BAXLEY Has he gone?

ELSIE (*tearfully*) Yes And I'm going to bed Good night

RADFERN (*gravely*) Listen, Elsie—

ELSIE (*shaking her head*) No, no more now I can't, Dad Good night

She closes the door and vanishes

RADFERN (*looking after her, gravely*) Poor kid, I'm afraid she's got more than she bargained for

MRS BAXLEY (*tartly*) We've all got more than we bargained for, if you ask me Even the great adventurer, Bernard here

BAXLEY (*dazed, staring at RADFERN*) Look here, George, for God's sake tell us the truth now

RADFERN (*impressively*) I'm telling you the truth I've not been in the wholesale paper trade for the last four years All this (*waves his hand*) comes out of the proceeds of illegal and criminal actions Tainted money, Bernard And you've been enjoying it for some time,

and I believe you'd like a good slice more of it, wouldn't you? Tainted money Ill-gotten gains And mind you're not an accessory

BAXLEY (*frightened*) I'll see to that

MRS BAXLEY This is upsetting my stomach Why, every time I see a policeman now, I'll be frightened out of my life

RADFERN Oh—forget about it

MRS BAXLEY (*scornfully*) Forget about it! (*There is a sharp ring at the front door bell*) What's that?

RADFERN (*coolly*) I can tell you what that is That's Dorothy and she's forgotten her front door key again Now don't forget Not a word to her

BAXLEY (*moving towards door*) Here, I'm off upstairs

MRS BAXLEY So am I I couldn't face her to-night

BAXLEY Let's get out of the way first

RADFERN (*almost pushing them in front of him*) Go on then, hurry up

They hurry out and he follows, stopping to light his pipe Then he goes out and re-enters with MRS RADFERN, a pleasant-looking woman in her early forties

MRS RADFERN (*staring*) Hello, where is everybody?

RADFERN I think Elsie had a bit of a tiff with that young man of hers, and went to bed early to have a little cry about it

MRS RADFERN Do you think I ought to go up?

RADFERN No, leave her alone She'll be all right

MRS RADFERN Well, where are Bernard and Lucy?

RADFERN They've just gone to bed

MRS RADFERN They went early

RADFERN (*very innocently*) Yes, I think they must have wanted to have a talk about something

MRS RADFERN (*taking her things off*) Well, I must say, Dad—though Lucy is my own sister—I wouldn't be heart-broken if they'd gone upstairs to talk about leaving us And I know you wouldn't be

RADFERN No, I'd get over it (*Begins putting supper things together*) Here, I'll give you a hand with these

MRS RADFERN No, you sit down and smoke your pipe in peace, Dad You've got to get up early in the morning to get yourself off, haven't you?

RADFERN Yes Early train to Birmingham

MRS RADFERN Well, then (*She begins bustling about with things, but stops to add affectionately*) You know, Dad, I sometimes think

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

you're a bit too quiet and easy-going, but—dear me!—Mrs Repington's been letting drop one or two things about *her* husband—and I was thinking on the way back I ought to be thankful I've got a nice honest, sleepy old thing like you

RADFERN (*giving her a pat on the shoulder*) Ah—now you're talking!
The curtain falls on them as they clear the table

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE I

SCENE *Same as Act one*

TIME *Early next morning*

The room has that very early morning look about it ELSIE, *not yet properly dressed, is discovered bringing in the milk* Then after a few moments BAXLEY enters *He is wearing an old dressing gown and looks dishevelled and still sleepy*

BAXLEY (*yawning*) Morning

ELSIE Morning, uncle

BAXLEY Thought I heard somebody moving about down here

ELSIE It must have been me

BAXLEY Of course it was you But you're usually the last downstairs and not the first What made you get up so early?

ELSIE I couldn't sleep And why are you up, uncle?

BAXLEY Well, I couldn't sleep either And I suddenly remembered your Dad was going to Birmingham early this morning

ELSIE I know I thought I'd get up and make his breakfast

BAXLEY That's a new idea, isn't it?

ELSIE Yes But the woman we have is away—ill So I thought I'd get up and do it

BAXLEY Quite right, quite right But, you know, if he were out East, a man like your Dad could have twenty servants—thirty servants Waited on hand and foot

ELSIE I know

BAXLEY Hand and foot

ELSIE He could be here, if he wanted to

BAXLEY I dare say, but you see now why he won't have a servant living in the house, don't you? You see?

ELSIE Yes

BAXLEY He's too clever for that, much too clever He knows what he's doing Those his boots?

ELSIE Yes

BAXLEY They could do with a bit of a rub

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

ELSIE I was going to do them

BAXLEY No, no, I'll give 'em a rub It'll pass the time Get me the polishing outfit, will you, Elsie (*Sits down with boots, yawning, while ELSIE brings him the polishing outfit*) Thanks Now I'll make a good job of these It'll amuse your Dad What are you giving him for breakfast?

ELSIE Boiled eggs They're easiest

BAXLEY How does he like his eggs boiled?

ELSIE I can't remember

BAXLEY (*reproachfully*) You ought to remember how your own Dad likes his eggs boiled

ELSIE Do you remember how *your* Dad liked his eggs boiled?

BAXLEY Don't be silly, Elsie, that's quite different You're a girl And, besides, it's such a long time since I lived with my old governor

ELSIE What did your Dad do, uncle?

BAXLEY He used to travel the North Midlands—from Wolverhampton to Stockport—for the Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Company, selling hymn-books and Sunday school prizes He had to look religious all the time, so he always dressed in black, and he wore a chin beard, like a Mormon And he didn't smoke, and he didn't drink, so he used to eat a lot of cough candy Bags of it Absolutely stank of cough candy I can smell it now (*He sniffs*) A sort of mixture of treacle and fire-lighters

ELSIE Was he nice?

BAXLEY No, he was hellishly dull

ELSIE (*plaintively*) I thought my Dad was dull And I wish he was now

BAXLEY Well, he isn't

ELSIE I know Uncle, do you think it's really true—what Dad told us last night?

BAXLEY Yes Must be

ELSIE But Dad! Just think of it!

BAXLEY (*irritably*) It's no good telling me to think of it, Elsie I've been thinking about it—and talking about it—half the night

ELSIE I've hardly slept a wink

BAXLEY I'm not surprised

ELSIE I got so frightened in the middle of the night

BAXLEY Well, if you ask me, you've got something to be frightened about

ELSIE (*in tense whisper*) Listen, uncle—if they caught him, would he really be sent to prison?

BAXLEY I should think he would. He'd get years and years. Penal servitude.

ELSIE But he's never done anything before.

BAXLEY What difference does that make, when he's been doing this all the time. This is a big job. They'd drop on him like a ton of bricks.

ELSIE (*awed*) Would they?

BAXLEY (*with gloomy pride*) Go for him tooth and nail. Yes, tooth and nail. Like a ton of bricks. Penal servitude for years and years—and years.

ELSIE But, uncle—it's awful.

BAXLEY (*solemnly beginning on other boot*) Well, speaking as a man of the world who's seen the world—I call that a well-polished boot! It's pretty serious—pretty serious.

ELSIE And they've only got to catch him.

BAXLEY Just got to lay their hands on him, once, that's all.

ELSIE *stares at him in horror*. MRS BAXLEY *enters, half dressed and looking very worn*. ELSIE *gives a tiny scream and whirls round*.

ELSIE Oh—auntie—you made me jump.

MRS BAXLEY, I dare say. Anything's enough to make anybody jump, in this house. What are you up so early for?

ELSIE I'm getting Dad's breakfast ready.

MRS BAXLEY Well, I thought I'd just come down to see if I could do anything for him. And what are you doing, Bernard?

BAXLEY (*very off-handedly*) Oh—just giving George's boots a bit of a rub.

MRS BAXLEY Be careful—or you might be cleaning my boots next. Is the tea made yet?—because I must say I could do with a cup. (*Sits down wearily*) What a night!

BAXLEY (*irritably*) We know, we know.

MRS BAXLEY She doesn't know, does she? (*To ELSIE*) I haven't had such a night for years. Talked and talked about it all, then thought and thought about it all, and then when I did get a bit of sleep, I had to dream about policemen, hundreds of policemen.

ELSIE (*distressed*) Oh—don't!

BAXLEY No. What do you want to start that for, first thing in the morning?

MRS BAXLEY Start what?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

BAXLEY Talking about policemen

MRS BAXLEY Well, they still exist, don't they? And I know I shan't be able to look a policeman in the face

BAXLEY Well, why do you want to look a policeman in the face?

MRS BAXLEY Oh—don't you begin again You said enough last night

BAXLEY Yes, when I could get a word in edgeways

MRS BAXLEY It was two o'clock when I asked you to stop talking

BAXLEY Yes, and it was half-past two when you began again

ELSIE (*who has gone to door into house and closed it*) Now listen—you're not to tell anybody

BAXLEY Not likely!

MRS BAXLEY (*indignantly*) As if we should! It's bad enough knowing about it without telling anybody

ELSIE But not even mother Don't forget

MRS BAXLEY You're not going to tell me that all this has been going on all this time and your mother doesn't know anything about it?

ELSIE I'm sure she doesn't know anything about it

MRS BAXLEY Well, I can't understand why She's my own sister, and she never seemed to me to miss much And if she doesn't know, she ought to If your uncle here had been up to any queer game like that, I'd have known all about it

BAXLEY You might—and then again you might not

MRS BAXLEY What's that?

BAXLEY I said you might—and then again you might not

MRS BAXLEY Oh—and what's your funny game been then?

BAXLEY I didn't say there'd been any funny game I only said—if there had been, you might know—and then again——

MRS BAXLEY I might not I heard you Well, there isn't any might about it I'd have known And I don't see how George has kept it from Dorothy all this time

BAXLEY (*with gloomy pride*) Ah—that's where he's been so clever, keeping it from her and from us and from everybody That's where his cleverness comes in

ELSIE Yes, I suppose he must have been terribly clever all the time And I never thought he was

BAXLEY Ah—I've always had my own ideas about him

MRS. BAXLEY Well, his being clever was never one of them

BAXLEY Oh, yes, it was I've had my suspicions for some time

MRS BAXLEY That's news to me

ELSIE The kettle! (*She hurries into the kitchen*)

BAXLEY He's got a lot of brains, George has

MRS BAXLEY Oh?

BAXLEY Yes Some of the things he's said to me showed that He didn't bother saying them to you

MRS BAXLEY I see

BAXLEY Good

MRS BAXLEY Well, it isn't good And let me tell you he never struck me as being clever

BAXLEY Yes, but what do you know about it?

MRS BAXLEY I know this about it, that he'd have been cleverer if he'd kept all this to himself It's bad enough telling us, but he went and told that young fellow of Elsie's Is that clever?

BAXLEY Yes, if he wanted to get rid of him And I believe that's what he was after

MRS BAXLEY Yes, and where's that young fellow—Harold—now?

BAXLEY In bed, if he's any sense

MRS BAXLEY You know what I mean What's to prevent him going to the police and telling them?

BAXLEY We had that out last night

MRS BAXLEY Well, let's have it out again this morning

BAXLEY I tell you, he's got no real evidence, and if he went to the police, they'd laugh at him Besides, he wouldn't go Would you?

MRS BAXLEY Me! Don't be silly I don't want to see a policeman for weeks

ELSIE *returns with the teapot, which she places on the table*

ELSIE I know he likes his tea strong, anyhow

MRS BAXLEY (*sniffing round the pot*) That's a good thing, because by the time he comes down it'll have stewed itself as black as ink I like my tea fresh

ELSIE You shall have a cup in a minute, auntie I expect Dad will be down soon And now I know he's so clever, I wish I didn't I wish now I hadn't said he was dull and stupid I wish he *was* dull and stupid again

BAXLEY How could he be dull again if he never was?

ELSIE (*distressed*) You know what I mean

MRS BAXLEY Oh, don't bother with your uncle He doesn't know what anybody means this morning

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

ELSIE I believe I started it last night by saying this was a dull and stupid place where nothing happened

MRS BAXLEY I dare say you did—you and your young man between you

BAXLEY Don't be so silly How could they start it when it's been going on for years?

MRS BAXLEY It was all in the cards

BAXLEY If it was all in the cards, why didn't you tell us then?

MRS BAXLEY Elsie, didn't I say your Dad was going to give us a big surprise?

BAXLEY Well, what's the good of telling us we're going to get a big surprise, if you don't say what the surprise is?

MRS BAXLEY If I knew what it was, it wouldn't be a surprise, would it—cleverhead?

ELSIE The point is, if I hadn't started talking like that, last night, we shouldn't have known all about this, and it's knowing about it that's so awful I can't help thinking about it all the time

MRS BAXLEY Same with me, just the same

ELSIE Besides, there's—Harold

MRS BAXLEY Ah, yes How's he going to take it?

BAXLEY You saw how he took it last night (*In loud complacent tone*) You've got to look at it this way——

ELSIE He's coming down

MRS BAXLEY Shut up He's here

They all three of them are instantly expectant, rigid, like soldiers awaiting a general RADFERN enters, a bustling genial figure, fully dressed except that he is wearing slippers

RADFERN Good morning Hello, what's all this? Three of you up?

BAXLEY (*respectfully*) Good morning, George

RADFERN (*dryly*) Good morning, Bernard I trust I see you well And you, Lucy Morning, Elsie

ELSIE Good morning, Dad

MRS BAXLEY (*gloomily*) How did you sleep last night, George?

RADFERN (*heartily*) How did I sleep? I slept like a top I always do Don't you?

MRS BAXLEY (*reproachfully*) I didn't last night None of us did

RADFERN Oh? Well, why have you all got up so early?

ELSIE I thought I'd get your breakfast ready, Dad

RADFERN Very kind of you, Elsie, very kind of you And—er—(*looks quizzically at the other two*) ——?

BAXLEY Well, old man, I thought I'd just look down and see if there was anything I could do Like to make myself useful at times, y'know Knew you were going off early

RADFERN Aren't those my boots?

BAXLEY (*off-handedly*) Yes Matter of fact I've just been giving them a bit of a rub

RADFERN (*looking at them*) You've given them a very good rub, Bernard Thank you And what about you, Lucy?

MRS BAXLEY (*rather defiantly*) Oh—you needn't thank me. I came down because I couldn't sleep and I wanted a cup of tea

RADFERN Quite right And have you had a cup of tea?

MRS BAXLEY No

RADFERN Then give your Aunt Lucy a cup of tea—quick, Elsie

As ELSIE does this, RADFERN sits down and looks quizzically from one to the other of them

RADFERN Well, well, well My boots Tea all ready I call this being waited on hand and foot This is as good as being out East, Bernard

BAXLEY Oh no I was just saying, George, that a man like you—out East—would have twenty or thirty servants

RADFERN I wouldn't know what to do with them

ELSIE Dad, how do you like your eggs boiling?

RADFERN I haven't touched a boiled egg for the last two years, Elsie Don't agree with me

ELSIE (*self-reproachfully*) Shows how much I've been noticing things, doesn't it?

RADFERN (*affectionately, embracing her*) Never mind

ELSIE What will you have for breakfast then, Dad?

BAXLEY Want a good breakfast if you're travelling, George

RADFERN Oh—I always breakfast on the train Helps to pass the time

ELSIE Oh—but I've made the tea

RADFERN That's all right I've time for a cup of tea Very nice

MRS BAXLEY Where is it you're going, George?

RADFERN (*cheerfully*) I'm going to Birmingham for the day—on business

MRS BAXLEY (*bitterly*) Business!

RADFERN That's what I said—business You don't think I'd go to Birmingham for pleasure, do you?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

MRS BAXLEY (*still bitter*) Yes—but there's business *and* business
RADFERN (*genially, but with point*) You mean—there's your own business—and other people's business?

MRS BAXLEY No, I don't

ELSIE (*reproachfully*) You know what she means, Dad

RADFERN (*echoing* MRS BAXLEY) No, I don't

BAXLEY The queer work, that's what she means

ELSIE Yes—you know—crook stuff

RADFERN Crook stuff! Crook stuff! What a way to talk, especially early on Monday morning Crook stuff

MRS BAXLEY Well, what do you call it then?

RADFERN Business Not crook stuff! This comes of going so often to the pictures What would they think if they heard you at *Ben Machree*?

ELSIE (*earnestly*) But, Dad, you told us last night

RADFERN Oh—so I told you last night, did I?

BAXLEY You know very well you spilt it all last night, George Can't get out of it now We know

ELSIE And I was awake all night thinking about it And so were Uncle Bernard and Aunt Lucy

BAXLEY No, not all night

MRS BAXLEY Well, you never stopped talking all night I suppose you must have been talking in your sleep

BAXLEY And I suppose you must have been listening in your sleep

RADFERN Just a minute Here's a very good rule, if you want to have a nice quiet comfortable existence——

MRS BAXLEY (*bitterly*) Like you, I suppose, George?

RADFERN Yes, like me It's a rule I've just invented, but never mind about that Somebody's got to invent the rules some time

BAXLEY Quite right, old man

RADFERN The rule's this Never think or talk on Monday morning about something that's been said on Sunday night

ELSIE (*half laughing, half tearful*) Oh, Dad—that's silly

RADFERN No, it isn't On Monday morning you must start with a clean slate, because you're beginning a new week

MRS BAXLEY (*bitterly*) Did you say—a clean slate?

RADFERN That's what I said

MRS BAXLEY (*angrily*) Well, how you can talk like that, George Radfern, after all the things you told us last night and with the police

perhaps ready to march in here any minute and take us all off—
(*A thundering knock outside She stops and gives a little scream*)
What's that?

RADFERN (*coolly*) The postman

ELSIE (*hastily*) I'll go

She hurries out RADFERN lights his pipe

RADFERN (*looking at watch*) How's the time? Oh—I'm all right
Begins putting on his boots

BAXLEY Is there anything I can do for you, George?

RADFERN (*respectfully*) No, I don't think so, thank you, Bernard
You've done enough Look at these boots You mustn't spoil me
just because I don't make an honest living

ELSIE *returns with three letters, two of which she places on the table*

ELSIE Two for you, Dad This is mine

BAXLEY Nothing for us then?

MRS BAXLEY Well, what should there be for us?

BAXLEY Oh, I dunno I thought one of the chaps might have
written

MRS BAXLEY What chaps?

BAXLEY Well—the chaps

MRS BAXLEY I heard you

BAXLEY All right then, if you heard me, shut up

ELSIE *opens her letter and reads it eagerly, then gives a sharp cry of dismay*

RADFERN What is it?

ELSIE (*in distress*) It's from Harold He says he won't—oh, it's
all over

RADFERN (*going to her*) Never mind, Elsie

ELSIE (*tearful*) Oh—but you don't understand—

RADFERN (*softly*) Listen, Elsie Honestly, he's not worth bother-
ing about—

ELSIE (*tearful and angry, cutting in*) It's all your fault You've done
it Oh!

She bursts into tears, pushes RADFERN away and hurries towards door into house Before she gets there MRS RADFERN appears in doorway

MRS RADFERN (*astonished*) What's the matter?

ELSIE (*in tears*) Everything

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

ELSIE pushes past and goes out MRS RADFERN *stares after her for a moment, then stares at the other three*

MRS RADFERN Now will anybody tell me what's happening in this house? Elsie up early You two up Elsie crying What in the name of wonder is it all about?

RADFERN Leave Elsie alone, mother It's that blathering, weak-kneed, spineless young man of hers, Harold

MRS RADFERN What's he done?

RADFERN She's just had a letter from him They've had some sort of quarrel And he's just broken it off

MRS RADFERN So that's it I'd like to say something to that young man Doesn't know his own mind

BAXLEY Hasn't got one Spotted it in a minute

MRS RADFERN What does he want to make her miserable like that for? Who's he—I'd like to know—to be going on shilly-shallying and quarrelling—

RADFERN He's not worth it

BAXLEY Of course he isn't I could have told you that

MRS BAXLEY Pity you don't tell us all the things you know

RADFERN Listen, mother Don't say anything to her Leave her alone

MRS RADFERN Well, that's all right, but I don't want her crying her eyes out all day—

RADFERN Couldn't you take her out, for the day Down into town—shopping—or something—?

MRS RADFERN I don't see how I can to-day, Dad I've a lot to do, and I promised Mrs Repington I'd go to the servants' registry for her this morning

RADFERN Well, you're not doing anything this morning, are you, Lucy?

MRS BAXLEY (*bitterly*) No, just enjoying myself, that's all

RADFERN Well, enjoy yourself a bit more, and you and Bernard take Elsie into the West End Look at the shops Go to the pictures

MRS BAXLEY And see one of these crook films, I suppose?

RADFERN (*heartily*) That's it Find a good crook film Be a nice change after this dull suburb Here (*Takes two pound notes out of his pocket book*) Take these and help her to spend them

MRS BAXLEY (*taking the notes but looking at them dubiously*) All right—I suppose ?

RADFERN Go on—they won't bite you

MRS RADFERN But it's too much, Dad

RADFERN Oh—let her spend it

MRS BAXLEY (*bitterly*) Plenty more where these come from, I expect

MRS RADFERN Well, that's a nice way to talk, Lucy

MRS BAXLEY (*grimly*) I beg your pardon

MRS RADFERN You'll go and make Elsie worse I'm sure she doesn't know the value of money as it is The way she talks sometimes, you'd think all you have to do is to pick money up in parcels

MRS BAXLEY (*grimly*) Indeed!

RADFERN Good idea that Money in parcels What do you say, Bernard?

BAXLEY (*embarrassed*) Er—yes—quite (*Laughs falsely*)

RADFERN Better than looking round, eh? Wish I knew where to pick some up

MRS BAXLEY You ought to try Birmingham

RADFERN I think I will Time to be off too If anybody wants me, you can say I'll be back about eight Joe Fletten may call round If he does, ask him to wait

MRS RADFERN What, Joe Fletten again! He'll never be out of the house soon

MRS BAXLEY No, these greenhouses do seem to give a lot of trouble, don't they?

RADFERN You're right, Lucy, they do Well, have a good day And keep Elsie quiet Must go and earn an honest penny now.

MRS BAXLEY (*in a deep disapproving tone*) A what?

RADFERN I said an honest penny Bye-bye

Gives BAXLEY and MRS BAXLEY a quizzical grin, kisses MRS.

RADFERN and then briskly departs

MRS RADFERN I don't know what brought you down so early this morning, Lucy, but you seem to have got out of the wrong side of the bed

MRS BAXLEY (*bristling*) Oh—and why?

BAXLEY You know why, Lucy

MRS BAXLEY (*severely*) And you be quiet (*To MRS RADFERN*) May I ask what's the matter with you?

MRS RADFERN Well, George gives you two pounds to take Elsie out with—and if you ask me, it's a lot too much—and then you go and stare at him and at the money, without a word of thanks, as if—as if—

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

MRS BAXLEY As if what?

MRS RADFERN I don't know As if he'd stolen it or something instead of having worked hard for years for it

MRS BAXLEY I suppose he *has* worked hard for years for it?

MRS RADFERN (*indignantly*) Of course he has I've told you so many times

MRS BAXLEY Yes, but sometimes I think he looks a bit too pleased with himself to be a man who's worked hard for years

MRS RADFERN Indeed! But you see *some* men don't mind working hard

MRS BAXLEY That's one at you, Bernard I'll leave you with it
She makes a move

MRS RADFERN You can first explain what's the matter with you

MRS BAXLEY (*with cold dignity*) Perhaps I can get into the bathroom now

She stalks out

MRS RADFERN Now what is the matter with her? She's very queer this morning

BAXLEY (*uneasily*) Oh—she didn't sleep so well last night

MRS RADFERN (*significantly*) Perhaps she could do with a change

BAXLEY Oh—no Bit too much noise perhaps and not enough air

MRS RADFERN (*with hostility*) There's plenty of air in this house

BAXLEY (*hastily*) Yes, but it all depends on what you're used to Now when we were out in Singapore—

MRS RADFERN (*coldly*) Just a minute, Bernard You had a great time in Singapore, didn't you?

BAXLEY Oh—yes, a great time, a great time

MRS RADFERN Well, there's one thing you seem to forget about Singapore

BAXLEY Oh no, never forget anything about Singapore

MRS RADFERN No, there's one thing you forget about it

BAXLEY What's that?

MRS RADFERN You forget that it's still there, waiting for you

She marches towards kitchen

BAXLEY (*puzzled*) Eh?

By the time it dawns on him, she has disappeared into the kitchen, and the curtain is rapidly falling

SCENE II

SCENE *Same as Act One* TIME *Late afternoon*

When the curtain rises, the room is empty. On the centre table there is a book, "The Great Bank Mystery", and a work basket. MRS RADFERN enters and begins looking in the work basket for things, finally produces some work and sits down with it. The front door bell rings, and she goes out to open the door, and the sound of her voice and her visitor's can be heard a moment later. She returns, followed by INSPECTOR STACK, a plain-clothes officer, a smart-looking fellow about forty with an assured authoritative manner. MRS RADFERN likes the look of him.

STACK Only for the day, eh?

MRS RADFERN Yes. Won't you sit down?

STACK Thank you

They both sit

MRS RADFERN (*chattily*) Yes, he's gone to Birmingham on business, just for the day. He often goes there.

STACK I see. Do you happen to know what time he'll be back to-night?

MRS RADFERN He said about eight o'clock.

STACK Then if I called some time after eight, I'd catch him in.

MRS RADFERN Sure to. I don't think he'll be going out again. It'll be either the greenhouse or the wireless for him to-night.

STACK (*respectfully*) Very wise of him too, Mrs Radfern. I wish they'd let me have more nice quiet evenings at home like that.

MRS RADFERN (*enjoying the little chat*) Oh—my husband's always been quite a home bird, you know. His business takes him out, of course, and sometimes away too, but the minute he's back, all he wants are his slippers and his pipe, and a book or his greenhouse or the wireless.

STACK Let me see, he's in the paper trade, isn't he?

MRS RADFERN Yes, the wholesale paper trade, not newspapers, you know, but paper for printing and writing on, and chiefly very fine-quality papers.

STACK (*blandly*) Good enough for—what shall we say?—bank notes, eh?

MRS RADFERN I dare say, but I don't know exactly. But I do know it's wholesale paper he's in, and always has been.

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STACK Got an office and a warehouse somewhere in the city, I suppose?

MRS RADFERN Oh yes It's just off Cloth Fair, you know, by Smithfield I remember the only time I went there, it was a very warm day and you could smell the meat in Smithfield Market—horrid it was

STACK I know Never cared for that smell myself Puts you off your beefsteaks And he's been able to keep going all right, through all these bad times?

MRS RADFERN Yes, I'm sure we can't grumble He got a bit down four or five years ago—like a lot of other people, you know—no fault of theirs at all—

STACK (*sympathetically*) Quite Just the hard times

MRS RADFERN That's it But, however, he's picked up again wonderfully since then I'm sure we can't grumble at all

STACK And I'm sure you don't grumble, Mrs Radfern

MRS RADFERN Why do you say that?

STACK (*smiling politely*) Well, you don't look the grumbling sort

MRS RADFERN (*pleased*) Oh, I've always believed in making the best of everything We're only on this earth once, I always say, and so we'd better make the best of it (*With more energy, though not at all rudely*) Though why I'm talking like this to a complete stranger, I really don't know Let me see, you didn't give me your name, did you?

STACK No I'm sorry Here's my card (*Hands it over*)

MRS RADFERN (*reading*) Detective-Inspector Stack, Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard Good gracious! Are you from Scotland Yard? A detective?

Puts card down in prominent place on the table

STACK (*smiling*) I am Do I look like one?

MRS RADFERN I'm sure I don't know I've never seen anybody from Scotland Yard before You certainly don't look like a policeman

STACK Well, that's something to be thankful for

MRS RADFERN But what do you want with my husband?

STACK (*smoothly*) I'm only making a few enquiries, and Mr. Radfern's name was given to me as one of the people who might be able to give me a little information I'm sorry to disappoint you, but it's nothing sensational Nobody murdered No jewels stolen Just one of those dull routine commercial cases.

MRS RADFERN Well, I'm sure if my husband can help you at all, he will. And it'll amuse him meeting somebody from Scotland Yard,

because he's very fond of reading these detective stories He's just made me read one with him

STACK Well, I understand Mr Radfern had some dealings with one of the firms in question, some years ago, so I thought he might be able to give me a little information And then he gets up and down a good deal, I think, doesn't he?

MRS RADFERN Yes, he has to get about

STACK Birmingham, for instance Of course, that's not very far, is it?

MRS RADFERN No, but that's about the nearest place Sometimes he goes to Liverpool And Newcastle

STACK And up into Scotland, I expect?

MRS RADFERN Yes, he has to go to Glasgow quite a lot

STACK Has he really? Still that's not so troublesome as having to go abroad, after all

MRS RADFERN Oh—he has to do that sometimes, too

STACK Yes? Well, I'm not surprised I used to have a friend in the same line of business and he used to have to go quite often to Amsterdam and Brussels

MRS RADFERN That's just where my husband has to go sometimes Amsterdam and Brussels He probably knows this friend of yours

STACK I wouldn't be surprised if he did

MRS RADFERN You must ask him, if you're calling in to-night

STACK I will (*Rising*) I won't detain you any longer, Mrs Radfern I'll look in again to-night, if Mr Radfern won't mind having a private little chat with me

MRS RADFERN I'm sure he won't (*Noise of people entering house*) Just a minute, that's my daughter and my sister and her husband coming back Do just let me introduce you because they'll be terribly interested in meeting a detective from Scotland Yard

STACK *nods, smiling, and stands half facing door* ELsie, BAXLEY and MRS BAXLEY enter, carrying some small parcels They stare at STACK but MRS RADFERN begins before they have a chance to speak

(*Playfully*) Now you three, I'll bet you anything you'll never guess who this is

All three look enquiringly at STACK

MRS BAXLEY (*gloomily*) Nobody I know

BAXLEY (*hopefully*) The face is familiar

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ELSIE No, I can't guess

MRS. RADFERN (*pleased with herself*) Well, this is Detective Inspector Stack from Scotland Yard

ELSIE, BAXLEY and MRS BAXLEY *instantly look the picture of dismay, alarm and horror* ELSIE *just stifles a little scream*
BAXLEY's jaw drops MRS BAXLEY's eyes *nearly pop out of her head*

You needn't look like that If he'd come to lock you all up, you couldn't look worse (*To STACK*) I'm sorry, If they've all been up to something, I don't know what it is

STACK Oh, that's nothing We get used to people looking at us like that Well, I'll call again to-night to see Mr Radfern Good afternoon

Moves to the door, and MRS RADFERN follows, to let him out
The other three, dumb with terror, simply stand watching them
MRS RADFERN *returns at once*

MRS RADFERN Well, I must say you're a fine lot It's a wonder he didn't think you were a lot of crooks or something Such a nice man, I thought, too Superior, and very gentlemanly manners, I'm sure What's the matter?

ELSIE Mother, was he really from Scotland Yard and wanting to see Dad?

MRS RADFERN Of course

BAXLEY My God! Here, Lucy, we're packing

MRS RADFERN What do you mean you're packing? What's the matter?

MRS BAXLEY Arresting and prison and penal servitude's the matter

ELSIE (*ready to break down*) Oh—mother!

BAXLEY (*moving towards door*) Come on, Lucy We're getting out of this—sharp

MRS RADFERN (*taking a place in front of door and blocking the way*) Oh no, you're not, Bernard, not until you've told me what's wrong What have you done?

BAXLEY (*indignantly*) Me! I've done nothing

MRS BAXLEY No, don't start trying to blame it on to us now

MRS RADFERN Blame what on to you?

MRS BAXLEY Better ask Elsie This isn't any place for us

MRS RADFERN Well, it's going to be until you tell me what it is you're all frightened of

ELSIE Oh—mother—it's Dad

MRS RADFERN Dad!

MRS BAXLEY (*butterly*) Yes, Dad, your precious quiet respectable George with his honest pennies

ELSIE It's true, mother He told us himself, last night

MRS RADFERN (*exasperated*) Told you *what*, you stupid?

MRS BAXLEY Told us he was a crook

BAXLEY And been one for years

MRS BAXLEY Every penny dishonest

BAXLEY Working with a big gang, all the detectives after them

MRS BAXLEY And proud of it, glories in it

BAXLEY And he'll get years and years, penal servitude

ELSIE (*tearfully*) Oh—mother, it's true

MRS RADFERN (*loudly*) Stop, stop! (*They are quiet, so she continues quietly*) Now what is it you're all trying to tell me? What did Dad say to you last night?

BAXLEY You'd better get Elsie to tell you We're going to pack

MRS RADFERN No, you're not Nobody's leaving this room until I understand exactly what all this is about Now who's going to tell me?

MRS BAXLEY Go on, Elsie You tell her

ELSIE Last night, just before you came back, Dad told us that he hadn't been in the paper business for years, but that he'd been a crook

MRS RADFERN He told you and Lucy and Bernard here——

ELSIE And Harold

MRS RADFERN Oh, he told Harold too, did he?

ELSIE Yes And he said he'd been a sort of crook for years, and that he worked for a big international gang——

BAXLEY That started in America

MRS RADFERN I see That started in America Go on

ELSIE And that they swindled banks, in America, and here in and France and all over

BAXLEY Counterfeiting notes and forging bonds

MRS BAXLEY All sorts of dangerous dirty tricks

ELSIE And that the detectives had been trying for years to track down this gang but they couldn't manage it, but if he was caught, he'd get years and years of prison

BAXLEY And so he would too

MRS RADFERN And that's what he told all the four of you, is it?

ELSIE Yes—and mother, it's true And that's why he has to keep

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going to various places, up and down the country, and abroad And that's why Mr Fletten comes here such a lot, because he's working for this gang too, and he doesn't really know anything about green-houses—that's——

BAXLEY Just a blind, just a blind He's taken everybody in up to now, but this time he's for it

MRS RADFERN And he asked you not to tell me?

MRS BAXLEY Yes Said you didn't know, and weren't to know, though I must say how he's kept it from you all this time beats me

MRS RADFERN Oh—that's quite simple

MRS BAXLEY Is it?

MRS RADFERN Certainly it is I can explain in three seconds why he's never told me and yet told you all about it last night

BAXLEY Why?

MRS RADFERN Because he knew very well that you were four silly fools who'd believe any nonsense he told them, and he knew very well he couldn't come out with that silly stuff in front of me Can't you see he was simply having a game with you? And serve you right too Just because he likes to be quiet when he's at home, you've got it into your heads that he's a dull old stick I've heard you say as much, Elsie And you two are as bad And as for your Harold, I know what Dad was trying to do to him—just scaring him away (*To ELSIE*) And is that why you had that letter from him this morning, breaking it off, and why you cried your eyes out?

ELSIE Yes of course

MRS RADFERN And why you were all so queer and said you hadn't slept last night?

MRS BAXLEY (*with dignity*) Naturally

MRS RADFERN And why you all got up so early this morning?

BAXLEY That's it

MRS RADFERN Then you're all sillier than I ever thought you were

ELSIE But mother, it's true

MRS RADFERN Of course it isn't true Not a word of truth in it Do you think I wouldn't have known? How you could ever have thought it was true, I can't imagine

BAXLEY It's all right talking like that——

MRS RADFERN And now I suppose you thought that Inspector had come to arrest him If you want to know, that Inspector was only making some enquiries about a commercial case——

BAXLEY That's what *he* says

MRS RADFERN Oh—have some sense, Bernard, even if you have been to Singapore Do you think I'd be calmly talking about it like this if I thought for a minute Dad had ever done anything wrong?

MRS BAXLEY Well, you don't know he hasn't

BAXLEY *We* heard him last night, remember—not you

MRS RADFERN I know that story he told you last night was all nonsense, just made up to tease you and frighten you

ELSIE (*hopefully*) Oh mother, do you think it was?

MRS RADFERN I tell you, I *know* it was

BAXLEY But you can't prove it

MRS RADFERN (*triumphantly*) I can (*She goes to table and picks up the book there*) You see this book It's called *The Great Bank Mystery* I've just read it, and Dad's just read it And if you want to know all the rest of that story about the international gang of bank swindlers and bond forgers that started in America, you'll find it in this book

BAXLEY (*sitting down and mopping forehead*) Well, I'll be damned!

ELSIE (*joyfully*) Mother! (*Hugs her*)

MRS BAXLEY (*grumbling*) Well, that's a nice trick, frightening people with a lot of silly stuff out of a detective tale!

BAXLEY Yes, it's a bit thick

MRS BAXLEY (*indignantly*) It's a lot thick

MRS RADFERN (*suddenly beginning to laugh*) Dad's a monkey——

MRS BAXLEY And I call it a foul monkey trick, too I've had an awful day Every time I've set eyes on a policeman I've shivered, and when I found that detective here my heart stopped and my blood went cold I might easily be ill after this

BAXLEY Well, I must say it's not my idea of a joke

MRS RADFERN (*still laughing*) Evidently not, Bernard But it seems to be George's And very well he did it too, though he'll hear something from me about it when he comes back

ELSIE (*happily*) Oh, I don't care now Everything's different It's been awful I'll never say anybody's dull again—never, never, never I don't care how dull they are It's all nice and safe and sensible again now Lovely

She hurries out

MRS RADFERN Well, she's feeling a lot better already It was silly of George to frighten her like that Poor Elsie!

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MRS BAXLEY And what about us, Dorothy? Weren't we frightened, too?

BAXLEY I've been worried to death about George ever since he told us that story

MRS BAXLEY So have I And I do think, Dorothy, that George owes us some consideration after this silly trick he's played on us

MRS RADFERN You do, eh?

MRS BAXLEY Yes, I do He's not been as pleasant as he might have been these last few days, and I hope he'll realise now that the least thing he can do is to help Bernard to buy that little business we've talked about

BAXLEY Well, seeing you've mentioned it, Lucy, I might as well say that's what I feel too He's had his fun——

MRS RADFERN (*very quietly*) And now he must pay for it Is that it?

BAXLEY Oh—you can't put it like that But you know our position, Dorothy If George can let me have a temporary loan of a few hundreds and we can stay on here until the deal goes through——

MRS BAXLEY I don't think you can object to that, Dorothy And you can tell him how much he's upset me with that silly joke of his——

MRS RADFERN (*quietly, but decisively*) Just a minute I want to understand you properly You both feel that, after this, I ought to persuade George to let you have the money and I also ought to ask you to stay on until you've bought the business you're after Is that it?

BAXLEY Yes, that's it

MRS RADFERN Well, Lucy—and Bernard—I'm going to tell you straight what I think about it I think—you're both the limit And I see now that Dad was right about you and I was wrong

MRS BAXLEY What do you mean?

MRS RADFERN I mean that he was right in not wanting to put up with you any longer You're my relations, not his You've taken advantage of his good-nature, and so have I, through you You've stayed here and borrowed money from him too often He'd had enough of it when he told you that story last night And now I've had enough of it too

BAXLEY But here, half a minute, what have we done?

MRS RADFERN You've shown me quite plainly you don't really care tuppence about him, and that you're only here to get what you can out of him Only a few minutes ago, when you thought he was in trouble and might be arrested, what did you do? All you thought

about was yourselves You wanted to pack up and go at once I had to stop you going out of that door Well, now I'm not stopping you You can pack and go as soon as you like

MRS BAXLEY and BAXLEY look at one another ELSIE enters, and looks enquiringly from one to the other of them.

MRS BAXLEY That's a nice thing to say to a sister, isn't it?

MRS RADFERN No, it isn't, but that's how I feel, Lucy

BAXLEY More shame to you Come on, Lucy We'll pack I'm not staying where I'm not wanted (*Goes to door, Mrs BAXLEY following Then, turning at door*) I'd laugh now if the old boy really was a wrong 'un all the time

MRS RADFERN Well, you'll have to find something else to laugh at, Bernard

MRS BAXLEY (*bitterly, at door*) That oughtn't to be difficult—here
They go out

ELSIE Are they going?

MRS RADFERN Yes I told them to They've been sponging on Dad long enough and they're not going to get anything else out of him Wanted to bolt as soon as they thought he was in trouble (*As ELSIE goes to telephone*) What are you going to do?

ELSIE I'm going to tell Harold it was all Dad's nonsense At least I'm going to ask him to come here, so that I can tell him

MRS RADFERN He broke it off, didn't he, after what he heard last night?

ELSIE Yes

MRS RADFERN Another one that was found out

ELSIE Well, mother, you can't blame him for not wanting to be engaged to the daughter of a crook

MRS RADFERN (*sharply, derisively*) Can't you?

ELSIE (*doing her best*) No, of course you can't

MRS RADFERN *Can't you?*

ELSIE (*confusedly*) No Yes—I suppose you can

MRS RADFERN Of course you can blame him He ought to have been ready to stick to you, whatever your father turned out to be And you know it I can see Dad's right about your Harold He's a weak-kneed, shuffling boy—just out for what he can safely get

ELSIE You've no right to say that, mother I don't blame Harold really for breaking it off And anyhow he deserves another chance I'll tell him it was all a joke

MRS RADFERN If you do, I'll be ashamed of you

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ELSIE What for?

MRS RADFERN Well, where's your pride?

ELSIE I don't see where my pride comes in After all, it *was* a joke

MRS RADFERN This is where your pride comes in, or ought to come in He's proved already that he's not sufficiently fond of you to marry you whatever your father is

ELSIE (*hurt by this*) Don't—mother

MRS RADFERN And now you want to tell him it's all right If it was me, I wouldn't have him on those terms You get him up here—give him a last chance if you like—but don't tell him that last night was a joke Let him think it's still serious and then ask him if he still wants to break off the engagement finally That'll be a fair test

ELSIE All right, mother, I'll do that (*Begins dialling at telephone*) I'll simply ask him to come and see me, and then when he comes, I won't say a word about last night's business not being true Hello, I want Mr Harold Russ

MRS RADFERN (*moving to kitchen*) And I want a cup of tea

QUICK CURTAIN

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

SCENE *Same as Act Two*

The book and the INSPECTOR's card are still prominent on the table in centre In front not far from the door into the house is a fairly large suitcase, with a hat and raincoat on top of it BAXLEY is discovered poking about the room, looking for something He is out of temper, though not furiously angry

BAXLEY (*going to door into house and calling*) I say, Lucy Lucy Is my cigarette case up there? (*Pauses, listening to reply*) It isn't I've just looked for it Oh, all right

Gives a final glance round the room, but can't see it Then goes over to his raincoat and carefully searches pockets He finds the case in one of them, opens it and discovers that it is empty He goes to the sideboard, finds a box of cigarettes there and—after one glance over his shoulder—fills his case from the box, finally lighting one Then he puts the case in his pocket, and replaces the raincoat on the suitcase As he does this, the front door bell rings He hesitates a moment, then goes out, re-entering a moment later, followed by HAROLD

HAROLD Isn't Elsie in?

BAXLEY Yes, she'll be down in a minute She's helping my wife to finish her packing

HAROLD What? You off?

BAXLEY Yes Night train to Scotland—Dundee Got a brother there Nothing for me down here, you know

HAROLD (*sceptically*) No?

BAXLEY Oh no Not the right sort of opening They tried to persuade me to take an agency for business supplies—exclusive agency too—chap called Simpson—I said 'What's the good of business supplies, when business itself is so bad?' That stumped him Mind you, there's an opening there—in a small way Might suit a youngster like yourself But no good to me So I'm on the move I like to be on the move, always did Bit of a roamer, you know, old man, bit of a roamer

HAROLD (*sceptical*) Sez you

BAXLEY What's the *sez you* about We're not doing a talkie

HAROLD No, but you're not going to tell me that you're clearing out so suddenly just because you like travelling

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BAXLEY Oh?

HAROLD No, I know why you're going, and I don't blame you

BAXLEY Very good of you, old man, but still I don't know what you're talking about

HAROLD And I think if I'd any sense, I wouldn't be here either

BAXLEY Of course you wouldn't Marriage is a mug's game, you can take it from me

HAROLD I'm not talking about marriage

BAXLEY Then why shouldn't you be here?—Oh—you mean because of what he told us last night?

HAROLD Yes, of course

BAXLEY And you still believe that?

HAROLD Yes, don't you?

BAXLEY Of course not All a joke Bit of leg-pulling, that's all We're always pulling one another's legs here, you know Sometimes I pull his leg, sometimes he pulls mine Last night it was his turn

HAROLD It was his turn all right

BAXLEY And he's taken you in all this time Well, you surprise me I thought you were smart In the second-hand car trade, too

HAROLD Was it a joke?

BAXLEY Yes All rot Out of a book There's the book

HAROLD Look here, are you sure?

BAXLEY Well, I know a book when I see one

HAROLD Yes, but I mean—are you sure it did come from that book and it was a joke?

BAXLEY I keep telling you, don't I? If you don't want to believe me, don't It doesn't matter to me

HAROLD Oh well, I do believe you Does Elsie know?

BAXLEY Yes She knows

HAROLD I suppose she's asked me to come so that she can tell me, though she could have done that on the telephone

BAXLEY (*looking cunning*) Perhaps she isn't going to tell you

HAROLD Of course she's going to tell me Why shouldn't she?

BAXLEY She might be going to try you out

HAROLD Try me out? Oh—I see, pretend it wasn't a joke Keep the old man's game up for him, eh?

BAXLEY It's a possibility, isn't it?

HAROLD Yes Look here, don't tell her you've told me that it was all a joke

BAXLEY I won't tell her I hope it works—with her and her father too Serve 'em right

HAROLD What do you mean—serve them right? Do you mean I'd serve them right, because if you do, you're being very insulting

BAXLEY Then that isn't what I mean (*Looks at his watch*) Time's going on (*Goes to door and shouts outside*) I say, it's time we were off Well, come on, then Oh, all right

He goes out, and after a moment, ELSIE enters

ELSIE Hello, Harold

HAROLD Hello, Elsie You see, I came as soon as I could

He tries to kiss her, but she fends him off

ELSIE No, I want to talk first

HAROLD Oh, all right Well, let's talk then

ELSIE Wait a minute My uncle and aunt are just going

Enter MRS BAXLEY, dressed for travelling and carrying a small case

MRS BAXLEY Oh—you're here again, are you?

HAROLD Yes—do you mind?

MRS BAXLEY It doesn't matter to me who's here, though I know one who won't be here again for a long time—not if some people beg on their bended knees—and that's me

ELSIE Must you go now, Aunt Lucy?

MRS BAXLEY Your Uncle Bernard says so, if we're going to get that train

ELSIE You won't wait to say good-bye to mother? She'll be back in a minute

MRS BAXLEY No, thank you If I could wait, I wouldn't But you can give her one message from me

ELSIE What's that?

MRS BAXLEY Just remind her, from me, that there's no smoke without fire That's all No smoke without fire

Enter BAXLEY, carrying another bag

MRS BAXLEY Here you are then I'm all ready

BAXLEY What about a taxi?

MRS BAXLEY We're not having any taxis We can go to the station by Tube, can't we?

BAXLEY Yes, but what about from here to the Tube?

MRS BAXLEY We can walk that

BAXLEY Yes, but what about these bags?

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HAROLD (*maliciously*) It's ten minutes' walk

MRS BAXLEY Ten minutes' walk won't kill us

BAXLEY It won't kill you but it will kill me, carrying these bags (*Tries them*) This comes of giving the old country a chance Carrying bags It's a good job some of the chaps I knew out East can't see me now

MRS BAXLEY (*coldly*) What chaps?

BAXLEY! Well—the chaps—you know—out East

MRS BAXLEY Anybody would think you'd been Emperor of China to hear you talk What chaps?

BAXLEY (*shouting*) Never mind what chaps I don't like carrying these damned bags So there

MRS BAXLEY Well, you'll have to put up with it for once Good-bye, Elsie (*Kisses her perfunctorily*) And just try and be sensible, though that won't always be easy in *this* house (*To HAROLD*) Good-bye

HAROLD Good-bye

MRS BAXLEY (*very grimly*) Pleased to have met you Come on, Bernard

She stalks out

BAXLEY (*grappling with bags*) Ten minutes' walk! It's murder I've known stronger chaps than me strain their hearts doing silly things like this

ELSIE Never mind, uncle, you'll be able to have a good rest in the train

BAXLEY (*grumbling*) Good rest! It's a stopping train to Dundee I'll be able to take root Well, good-bye

HAROLD Good-bye

ELSIE Good-bye, uncle

BAXLEY Good-bye, Elsie (*Groans*) Good-bye

Goes out, followed by ELSIE, with HAROLD going as far as the door You hear the outer door banged to, then ELSIE returns

HAROLD They're clearing off suddenly, aren't they?

ELSIE Yes, as soon as they thought we were in trouble, they wanted to pack up and go, and that made mother angry—

HAROLD (*puzzled*) In trouble? You mean, because of what your father told us last night?

ELSIE Oh—it went further than that, because they thought somebody was coming here to arrest Dad So they wanted to go at once

So then mother told them to go She doesn't like people who leave you in the lurch, and (*meaningly*) I don't either

HAROLD But wait a minute There isn't anybody coming here to arrest your father?

ELSIE (*watching him*) Perhaps

HAROLD (*watching her, with faint smile*) Well—I don't care

ELSIE (*eagerly*) Harold—do you mean that?

HAROLD (*whose tone must suggest insincerity*) Yes, I do I really came to tell you how sorry I was—and am—about the way I went off last night and the letter I wrote to you You see—I hadn't time to think The whole thing completely took me by surprise

ELSIE You hadn't time to think about—what?

HAROLD About you And me When all that stuff came out, last night, all I felt—as any honest man would—was that I must keep out of this And for the moment—well—I suppose I mixed you up in it I realise now that's where I was wrong It's got nothing to do with us what your father is and does

ELSIE Do you really mean that, Harold?

HAROLD (*uneasily*) Yes, Elsie

ELSIE (*gravely*) Are you sure?

HAROLD (*still uneasy*) Well—yes

ELSIE Think of the disgrace, though, if Dad is found out

HAROLD (*with mock nobility*) Never mind We'll stick it (*Then hesitating*) And, after all, your father was exaggerating it, wasn't he?

ELSIE Was he?

HAROLD You know he was I should think he's rather a leg-puller, anyhow, isn't he?

ELSIE (*solemnly*) Oh no Dad isn't That's not like him at all Now, Uncle Bernard—you know, the one who was here just now—he'd say anything for tuppence You can't believe a word he says

HAROLD (*uneasily*) Can't you?

ELSIE Good Lord, no! He's an awful mischief-maker and a liar I hope he hasn't said anything to you

HAROLD Er—no—of course not

ELSIE (*watching him*) That's all right then, because you simply can't believe him Dad's quite different

HAROLD Look here—I don't quite understand this

ELSIE (*who is now standing in front of the centre table*) Well, it doesn't matter, does it? After all, the important thing is—us

HAROLD Oh yes—of course

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ELSIE That's all that matters, isn't it?

HAROLD (*approaching her*) Yes

ELSIE (*edging away*) No, I'm not going to kiss you—just yet

HAROLD (*moving*) Oh—come on, Elsie

ELSIE You must remember, Harold, you upset me terribly—running away like that last night and then writing me that letter I haven't got over it yet

HAROLD Well, I've told you it's all right now

ELSIE Yes, it may be for you, but it isn't for me I'd given you up, you see And it'll take me a very long time to get very fond of you all over again

HAROLD No, it won't

ELSIE (*who now puts the table between them*) Yes, it will Besides, I want to talk And if you're kissing, you can't talk seriously

HAROLD Well, we don't need to talk seriously (*They are now standing, looking at each other across the table*) I've told you, I want you and I don't care now what your father is and does

He catches sight of the card on the table and stares at it

ELSIE What's the matter?

HAROLD (*uneasily*) I suppose this is part of the joke, too?

ELSIE (*coolly*) Oh—the card No, the man left it when he came here this afternoon

HAROLD An Inspector from Scotland Yard?

ELSIE Yes, he came here this afternoon, to see Dad And he's coming again to-night

HAROLD My God!

ELSIE (*watching him*) Oh—I was terribly upset at first, but I've got over it now

HAROLD (*angrily*) Look here, what's going on here? First, your father tells us all that stuff about being a crook, and then your uncle tells me it's all a joke, and now you say there's somebody coming from Scotland Yard

ELSIE So uncle told you it was all a joke?

HAROLD (*sulkily*) If you must know—yes

ELSIE And you didn't tell me he told you You let me think you didn't know

HAROLD Well, what does that matter?

ELSIE It matters a lot

HAROLD (*flinging away, then turning on her*) I'm fed up with this

Is it a joke or isn't it? And if it is a joke, why did this chap from Scotland Yard come here?

ELSIE You'd better wait and ask him. He'll be here soon.

HAROLD (*nervously*) I'm not going to wait for him, I can tell you that. It's no business of mine.

Noise outside

ELSIE (*scornfully*) There's somebody there now. Hadn't you better go while there's time?

Enter RADFERN and FLETTEN

RADFERN (*heartily*) Hello, Elsie. I found Joe Fletten here waiting on the doorstep. Hello, what's the matter?

ELSIE I think you'd better go now, Harold.

RADFERN (*to HAROLD, rather grimly*) I thought you had gone—for good.

ELSIE So did I, this morning. But I thought I'd give him another chance. And now you can tell him, Dad.

RADFERN Tell him what?

ELSIE You can tell him what we found out from mother this afternoon, that what you said last night was all a joke and that Harold ran away for nothing.

RADFERN Oh—you've found that out, have you?

ELSIE Yes, mother showed us the book—it's this one, isn't it?—you got all that stuff out of.

FLETTEN What stuff? Or is this private and confidential?

ELSIE No, it isn't. Dad, last night, pretended he was a crook—

FLETTEN (*humorously shocked*) Mr Radfern, how could you!

ELSIE And told us a lot of stuff he got out of this book. We all believed him at the time, and Harold here still thinks it's true and wants to run away.

FLETTEN (*severely to HAROLD*) Do you mean to say you could believe for one minute that my friend, Mr Radfern, was a crook? Mr Radfern of all people!

RADFERN Oh, he swallowed it all right.

HAROLD (*sulkily*) And so did everybody else.

FLETTEN Where's your intelligence, young man? Where's your what's it?—you know—sense of character. Mr Radfern a crook! You'll be thinking I'm a crook next.

ELSIE (*demurely*) We all did.

FLETTEN What me! Poor old Joe Fletten, who never did anybody any harm. And is this your idea of a joke, Mr Radfern?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

RADFERN Sorry, Joe Just a bit of fun on my part But I thought it might catch one or two people

FLETTEN (*severely, looking at HAROLD*) And it seems to have done

RADFERN Have your Aunt Lucy and Uncle Bernard gone?

ELSIE Yes, but that was because mother told them to go

RADFERN That's all right, as long as they've gone

FLETTEN (*to HAROLD*) Don't you think you might apologise to one or two of us?

HAROLD No, I don't (*To ELSIE*) Look here, I've had enough of this

ELSIE (*sadly*) All right, Harold I gave you a chance, you know Dad was right after all Good-bye

HAROLD (*as if about to break out angrily*) Oh—good night

Swings away and goes out quickly with RADFERN following him to the door ELSIE remains quite still FLETTEN looks at her, clears his throat as if to speak, thinks better of it and coughs instead, then hums a little When RADFERN returns, MRS RADFERN, dressed in her outdoor things, follows him in

MRS RADFERN Good evening, Mr Fletten (*To ELSIE*) So Lucy and Bernard have gone?

ELSIE Yes, quarter of an hour ago And so has Harold

MRS RADFERN I know that I nearly bumped into him at the front gate Has he—gone for good?

ELSIE (*rather unhappily*) Yes Tried and tested—and found wanting

RADFERN Never mind, Elsie I'll think of something very nice to make up for it

FLETTEN Young man actually thought your husband and me was a pair of crooks or something The cheek of it!

MRS RADFERN Oh—that was only George's nonsense, last night And a very silly thing to do, too, Dad

FLETTEN I can't understand how anybody believed it for a minute

MRS RADFERN Well, I must say, I'm surprised, too

RADFERN I did it very well

FLETTEN (*sententiously*) Well, I wouldn't have thought you had it in you, Mr Radfern, to play a part like that well—even for a bit of a joke And I doubt if it's anything to joke about

MRS RADFERN I rather agree with you there, Mr Fletten

FLETTEN (*as before*) We oughtn't to trifle with our good names—even in fun That's what I feel

RADFERN (*dryly*) And it does you credit

ELSIE (*as she begins moving towards door*) As a matter of fact, it wasn't anything Dad had said, but that card that caught Harold out to-night

RADFERN What card?

ELSIE (*turning in doorway*) That one on the table

Goes out

MRS RADFERN (*amused*) Oh—how absurd! She means the one left by the man from Scotland Yard

FLETTEN (*alarmed*) From where?

RADFERN (*quietly*) What's this about, then, mother?

MRS RADFERN Well, it's all rather amusing. It happened that a Detective-Inspector from Scotland Yard called to see you this afternoon—a very nice man indeed, and we had quite a nice little chat—

FLETTEN (*with glances of despair at RADFERN*) Did you now?

MRS RADFERN And he left his card. But what was so amusing was that Elsie and her aunt and uncle arrived before he'd gone and you ought to have seen their faces when I told them he was from Scotland Yard. You'd have screamed.

FLETTEN (*who is wearing the same sort of face they had*) I know I should. Oh—very amusing.

RADFERN (*putting up a good show*) Oh—yes, that's good. Ha, ha, ha!

FLETTEN (*not so good*) Isn't it? Ha, ha, ha!

RADFERN Did he say what he'd come for?

MRS RADFERN Yes. Of course it was something and nothing. Just some enquiries he was making in connection with a commercial case. I told him to come back to-night. He'll be here any minute now, I expect. You ought to have a good chat.

RADFERN I'm sure we shall.

MRS RADFERN Well, I'll go and take my things off and see what sort of mess Lucy and Bernard have made of their room upstairs.

Goes out

FLETTEN Look here, what's the idea?

RADFERN I don't know.

FLETTEN I don't believe in that commercial case he's come to make a few enquiries about.

RADFERN Neither do I.

FLETTEN Look here, I don't like this—

RADFERN Now don't get into a panic. Take it easy, but keep on

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your toes Listen, you've got to stay here I can't risk letting you go now Besides, there may be a lot to do Now the minute we hear him, I want you to go out through the greenhouse and sit on the grass on the other side, so you can't be seen

FLETTEN Well, somebody'll see me

RADFERN Yes, but this chap won't or anybody he's got with him Doesn't matter about the neighbours Look as if you're studying botany

FLETTEN I can't look as if I'm studying botany

RADFERN Well, look as if you're half tight and are falling asleep

FLETTEN I can do that all right

Front door bell rings

RADFERN And don't come out until you hear me calling you, but when you do hear me calling you, don't lose a second Understand? Outside, quick And keep down

FLETTEN goes out through door at back, closing it behind him

RADFERN goes through door into house, and then re-enters, followed by STACK

RADFERN Take a seat, Inspector

STACK Thanks

RADFERN Have a drink?

STACK No, thanks

They both sit down, preferably near the table

RADFERN This is very interesting I've never had the pleasure of talking to anybody from Scotland Yard before

STACK No, I don't suppose you have, Mr Radfern

RADFERN Must have a very exciting life, you chaps Different from some of us

STACK It's not as exciting as people seem to think Most of it's dull routine, and very long hours at that Not many quiet evenings at home

RADFERN Ah—that's a pity

STACK Yes, Mrs Radfern was telling me this afternoon that you liked to be quiet at home, with your greenhouse and so forth

RADFERN Yes My wife and daughter often laugh at me They think I'm a very dull old stick

STACK Still, I've known wives and children go sadly wrong about men, and think they were leading one sort of life when all the time they were leading a very different sort of life

RADFERN Is that so? I've never struck that myself

STACK (*meaningly*) Really? Are you sure?

RADFERN Well, I can't recall a case at the moment

STACK (*meaningly*) You surprise me

RADFERN But if there's anything I can tell you, I'll be only too pleased, though I can't imagine why you've taken the trouble to come and see me

STACK Trouble's nothing to us, Mr Radfern, if the case is big enough

He idly reaches out for book and looks at title

RADFERN I can well believe that

STACK (*holding up book*) Have you read this?

RADFERN What is it? Oh—*The Great Bank Mystery* Yes, I finished it yesterday

STACK What do you think of it?

RADFERN Oh—very entertaining But like most of these things, very far-fetched Have you read it?

STACK Yes, I have

RADFERN What do you think of it?

STACK Well, as you say, it's rather far-fetched The swindlers work on far too big a scale, to start with

RADFERN Yes, I should think so

STACK All the same, though, it reminds me of a case we've been working at now—one or other of us—for over three years

RADFERN Really! Now I call that interesting And over three years, you say

STACK Yes, over three years And no trouble and reasonable expense spared Mind you, we'll win in the end We can't lose

RADFERN Well, Inspector, I should hope not We taxpayers want to see something for our money

STACK We're sometimes very slow——

RADFERN But you're sure Isn't that it?

STACK That's it, Mr Radfern You see, for the last four years, at least, there's been a gang—a very clever, well-organised gang—who've been engaged in counterfeiting bank notes and Treasury notes

RADFERN No? I shouldn't have thought it could be done, these days

STACK This gang operates here in England and also abroad, chiefly from Amsterdam and Brussels Some of the notes are printed there, some of them here Here's one of their notes Perhaps you'd like to see it

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Brings out pocket-book and produces pound note

RADFERN I would

He brings out handkerchief and takes up note by one corner with a bit of handkerchief between his fingers and the note

STACK You needn't handle it as carefully as all that, Mr Radfern

RADFERN Well, I thought one couldn't be too careful

STACK (*softly*) If I wanted your fingerprints, you know, I could think of better ways of getting them

RADFERN (*examining note, laughs*) Never occurred to me I always thought this fingerprint business chiefly belonged to these detective yarns Well, y'know, if this is a fake, it would take me in I'm no expert, of course, but I'm in the paper trade, you know

STACK (*significantly*) So I understand, Mr Radfern

RADFERN I wouldn't have hesitated a minute giving anybody eight half-crowns for this chap Isn't it marvellous what they can do Never would have thought it!

STACK Surprising, isn't it? Oh—they're a clever lot

RADFERN They must be

STACK Humph!

RADFERN Humph!

STACK They've been clever at getting the right sort of paper, and with their engraving and printing, and with the way they've distributed the slush

RADFERN Slush?

STACK Slush And the Treasury and the banks haven't given us a minute's peace about this case But at last we're getting results

RADFERN Splendid!

STACK Yes, hundreds of little details that haven't meant anything much for months are now beginning to look like something

RADFERN Just like a jigsaw puzzle, eh?

STACK That's it Of course there are still a few pieces missing, but not many—not many It's only a matter of time now

RADFERN That's good, isn't it? You must be feeling very pleased with yourselves, eh?

STACK We'd feel better still if we could just mop it all up now

RADFERN (*sympathetically*) Of course you would

STACK. You see—this is how it often works in these cases—I hope I'm not boring you, Mr Radfern

RADFERN Not at all, Inspector Very interesting

STACK It works like this We come across a nice little nest of clues in—say—Birmingham——

RADFERN Birmingham will do I was there only to-day

STACK And among these clues is a name, just one of several names in a notebook And that name may turn up somewhere else—perhaps in Glasgow—perhaps in Amsterdam Well, the owner of that name is perhaps passing himself off as an ordinary respectable citizen and business man And he thinks he's safe Do you follow me?

RADFERN (*beaming, but with sardonic emphasis*) Yes, I should think I do Poor devil I can see it all This chap imagines he's safe And of course he isn't because you've got a lot of evidence against him

STACK Yes, a lot of evidence

RADFERN (*as before, but with more emphasis*) And of course it's solid evidence, cast-iron solid evidence that wouldn't make you look silly if you took such a quiet respectable chap into a police court

STACK (*now taking up the challenge*) No, that's not quite it, because in this instance, we haven't bothered to pile up the solid evidence yet But we've got one or two interesting little bits Would you like to hear them?

RADFERN I would, Inspector

STACK Well—for example—we know that a member of this counterfeiting ring arrived in Glasgow from the continent on the twenty-third of last month and was met by one of his confederates here And we're pretty sure we can prove that this quiet respectable citizen we're talking about was also there, in Glasgow, on the twenty-third of last month

RADFERN In Glasgow on the twenty-third of last month? You know, that reminds me of something The twenty-third? (*He takes out pocket diary and consults it*) Not that I was in Glasgow As a matter of fact I was in——

STACK (*quickly, triumphantly, standing*) Newcastle And so was this man who came from the continent Not in Glasgow at all That was a little trap and you walked straight into it

RADFERN (*very calmly*) Did I? I'm afraid I don't quite follow you there, Inspector Bit too sharp for me, I expect.

STACK (*grimly*) I shouldn't be surprised

RADFERN But what I was going to say was that I remember the twenty-third of last month because the Bowling Club here had an outing that day—up the river first and then finished off at the Palladium—and I was with them About twenty of us, there were

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STACK (*disappointed*) Humph!

RADFERN (*quietly, but forcibly*) Now that's what I was meaning, you know, Inspector Isn't that what they call an alibi? Well, you know, if I was that man and you were silly enough to rush me into court, that's the sort of thing—an alibi like that—which would make you all look very foolish, I imagine Mind you, I know nothing about it—but I've read some of these detective tales

STACK (*walks away, then suddenly swings round*) If you were that man we're talking about, do you know what I'd say to you?

RADFERN I can't imagine

STACK I'd say to you straight out, look here, we *know* you've been in this, but as yet we can't prove it, though sooner or later we'll be able to prove it But as the case has dragged on long enough and we want quick results, don't wait like a fool until we can put you in the dock, where nobody's going to have any mercy on you, but tell us all you know *now*—help us to clean the whole thing up—and we won't even *try* to prove anything against you

RADFERN Well, of course, I can't answer for this man——

STACK (*sardonically*) Never mind Make an effort and try

RADFERN I fancy the first thing he'd say is that you're bluffing

STACK And do you know what I'd reply to that, just to show him we weren't bluffing? First, I'd simply give him two addresses 59, Pool Road, Glasgow And, 17, Bellingham Street, Newcastle

RADFERN (*admiringly*) Just two addresses, like that Isn't that interesting, now?

STACK (*grimly*) Oh—he'd find it interesting all right Then I'd give him two names Peter Korderman and William Frazerly No bluffing there, you see We know about Korderman and Frazerly

RADFERN (*keeping it up*) You know, Inspector, this is as good as any of the films and detective tales to me Better It's a treat Go on

STACK All right Seeing that I'm putting some of my cards on the table, I might as well put this one (*He produces half a playing card, the Knave of Diamonds*) What do you think of that?

RADFERN (*examining the card*) Half a Jack of Diamonds That's grand But you're not going to tell me these chaps you're after use a thing like this?

STACK (*ironically*) We've got an idea they do Sort of visiting card, you know, Mr Radfern Quite romantic, isn't it?

RADFERN (*shaking his head*) That's the trouble It seems a bit too romantic to me.

STACK What do you mean?

RADFERN (*apologetically*) Well, of course, I don't know anything about these things——

STACK (*grimly*) No, no We know all about that

RADFERN But I'd say offhand that this torn card business looks like a bit of leg-pulling Too much in the story-book style, you know Sherlock Holmes Edgar Wallace I can imagine some chaps—you know, chaps who like a bit of fun—just planting something like this card on you, to keep you guessing and to amuse you (*Gives the card back*) And that Carl Korderman you mentioned——

STACK Peter Korderman

RADFERN Peter Korderman, then Well (*shaking his head*) he doesn't sound quite real to me, you know, Inspector Perhaps that's another bit of leg-pulling

STACK *stares at him speculatively, grunts, then walks away*

STACK (*suddenly turning*) Now listen, Radfern Let's drop this nonsense and talk straight

RADFERN Go on

STACK (*accusingly*) You're in this counterfeiting game I know damned well you are, and you know I know That's straight talking, isn't it?

RADFERN I don't know whether it's straight or not, but it seems to be very offensive talking

STACK Well, here's some more We want convictions, of course, but what we want even more than that is to break up the ring as soon as possible, because the Treasury and the banks are at us all the time Tell us all you know *now*, put the game into our hands, and we'll forget about you And you know what it means if we don't forget about you There'll be none of this my-first-offence-and-I-didn't-know-any-better humbug for you if you do find yourself in court You'll get as much as the judge can give you, and that's plenty Now what do you say?

RADFERN (*impressively*) This is what I say, Inspector Stack. My name is George Radfern, and I'm in the paper trade and can prove it I live at *Ferndale*, Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green, where I'm well known as a decent respectable citizen and a householder I've been swindled myself in my time, but if ever I've injured any man, woman or child in this country, then it's news to me And you haven't enough evidence against me to take me to that door And you know it

STACK Give me a bit more time, and I'll take you a lot further than that door.

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There is a knock at the door MRS RADFERN *looks in, smiling*

MRS RADFERN Oh—good evening, Inspector

STACK Good evening, Mrs Radfern

MRS RADFERN Excuse me interrupting you for a minute, but I've left my scissors down here (*Comes in, looks for them, and finds them*) Here they are Are you having an interesting talk, Dad?

RADFERN Very interesting

MRS RADFERN (*returning to door*) That's good I won't interrupt again

RADFERN Oh, mother You know all that stuff from the shipping companies—all those little books—that Elsie got to amuse herself with?

MRS RADFERN Yes, a whole heap of them She's still got them in her bedroom

RADFERN Good Well, tell her to bring them down with her when she comes Not just yet Later on

MRS RADFERN All right (*Nods and smiles at them both, then goes out*)

STACK Well, what do you say?

RADFERN You heard me ask for all those little books from the shipping companies that my daughter's been collecting She's always worrying me to take her away somewhere, and I think she could do with a change So could I, and business is slack now I've a good mind to go away on a nice long sea voyage

STACK Oh, you have, have you? Far?

RADFERN Oh—I don't know I should think so Australia perhaps Or the Far East Might find something new in the way of business And see the world, you know

STACK Always wanted to do it myself I'd hate to have to stop another man going

RADFERN I shouldn't like to see you even try, Inspector Just for your own sake

STACK Awkward things, though, ships You can't get off them when you like, that's the trouble And now that we've got wireless, they can't get out of hearing

RADFERN Yes, that's true.

STACK An English ship, you know, is as safe to us as an English police court

RADFERN No! An English ship as safe as an English police

court—— Then you'll know where to find me if you want me, won't you?

STACK I think so Well, that's that (*Preparing to go*)

RADFERN And thank you very much for calling, Inspector I've enjoyed this A peep behind the scenes Something to tell my friends about

STACK (*as he moves to door*) Good Any friend of yours, Mr Radfern, is interesting to me You wouldn't like to take me round and introduce me, would you?

RADFERN I shouldn't think that would be necessary, Inspector

He goes out with him, leaving door behind him open You hear them give one another ironically polite 'good nights', then you hear the sound of the front door being closed and locked RADFERN returns hastily and closes the sitting-room door behind him He is now a man of rapid decisive action He goes quickly to door at back and calls JOE JOE FLETTEN comes at once, brushing his trousers with his hands, his hat on the back of his head

FLETTEN (*excitedly*) What's happened? What does he know?

RADFERN Quite enough Now listen, Joe, and keep your head screwed on It's up to you now Go straight to Westerburg—and it doesn't matter where he is or what he's doing, you've got to see him——

FLETTEN I know where Westerburg is Always at the same place, Monday nights

RADFERN Tell him I've had a Scotland Yard man here They've got the Glasgow and Newcastle addresses, and they know about Korderman and Frazerly——

FLETTEN The hell they do! We're done then

RADFERN No, we're not That's all they do know *yet* And *that's* got to be all too Tell Westerburg it's Plan B now or nothing

FLETTEN What! Sink the plates and presses, and scatter!

RADFERN Yes, he knows what to do And tell him that anyhow I'm working on Plan B from to-night, and he'd better wire Amsterdam for me And I'll ring up Middleton myself now Have you got that?

FLETTEN Yes

RADFERN And you'd better put Plan B into action yourself, Joe, if you don't want to see Maidstone and Parkhurst again.

FLETTEN You bet your life I will

RADFERN (*pointing to back door*) That way then, and as quick as

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you can There's a narrow lane at the back Turn to the right at the top and you're at the Tube station in three minutes And for God's sake, make haste, but don't look as if you think the nearest bobby's going to put his hand on your shoulder Good luck, Joe Shan't see you for a long time—I hope

FLETTEN All the best, Mr Radfern

He hurries out at the back RADFERN goes to the telephone and begins dialling

RADFERN (*at telephone*) I want to speak to Mr Middleton, please

Hello, is that you, Charlie? Yes, Radfern Yes, everything all right at Birmingham But, listen, Charlie

Here MRS RADFERN and ELSIE enter The latter is carrying a lot of shipping booklets, etc She is listless and looks miserable

I've just had an Inspector from Scotland Yard Yes And you know how these chaps get about a bit, and he was saying that he didn't think business would be very good these next few months Yes, so I thought I'd take that holiday I've been promising myself for some time Yes, what we used to call Plan B—you remember our little joke Holland, of course All right, Charlie Good-bye

Puts down telephone

MRS RADFERN (*joyfully*) You didn't get arrested then, Dad?

RADFERN (*in same tone*) No, just managed to escape

MRS RADFERN What did the Inspector want?

RADFERN What you said Just making some enquiries about a commercial case he's on Queer life they have, those chaps

ELSIE (*joining in, but still listless*) Wouldn't suit you, Dad Too much excitement Not enough peace and quietness

RADFERN That's it

MRS RADFERN (*chaffing*) You didn't tell him what a tough old crook you were yourself, did you?

RADFERN No need to He knew it already

ELSIE (*still listless*) What were you saying on the telephone about going away?

RADFERN (*with affectionate concern*) Look here, Elsie You've got to brighten up, because there's a lot to do

ELSIE (*indifferently*) What is there to do?

RADFERN Well, one of the things you've got to do is to take your mother to Brussels to-morrow

ELSIE (*a changed girl*) Dad! You don't mean it!

RADFERN I do We're going to close this house and go on our travels

MRS RADFERN Good gracious me!

ELSIE Dad!

RADFERN Now, we've got passports

ELSIE Where are they marked for?

RADFERN Everywhere You see—we're going to close this house, pack up and go on a long sea voyage—East Indies, Far East, Australia—God knows where Only we're starting on one of those Dutch boats

MRS RADFERN Dutch boats! Why not an English boat?

RADFERN Oh, all the best boats that go out East are Dutch They're much more comfortable English boats are like police courts! You and your mother are going to Brussels first, and then you're going to meet me later, over there

MRS RADFERN But how are you going?

RADFERN I'm going straight to Holland Some business to attend to first A friend of mine will take me

ELSIE But how?

RADFERN By underground perhaps Never mind about that

ELSIE Oh—I don't mind about anything (*Embraces him*) Mother, we're going to travel (*Embraces her*)

MRS RADFERN I hope this isn't another of your jokes, Dad?

ELSIE Oh, Dad, I'll never forgive you if it is

RADFERN It isn't You've got twenty-four hours to pack up in and close this house and get off to Brussels

ELSIE (*babbling happily*) Then we won't go to bed at all And let's look at these things (*holding up shipping booklets*) and then we'll have supper and begin packing But we'll have to have some clothes, won't we, Mother, especially if we're going to hot countries, but I suppose we could get them in Brussels or wherever we're going—couldn't we go to Paris first and then we could buy some clothes there and it would be nearly as easy to get from Paris to Holland or wherever it is—

MRS RADFERN (*loudly*) Oh, Elsie, stop it My head's going round
There is a ring at the front door, very loud and persistent It startles them all

ELSIE I'll go

Runs off.

MRS RADFERN That child's so excited she doesn't know what she's talking about

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RADFERN Do her good

MRS RADFERN It won't if she's disappointed again

RADFERN I'll see to that

MRS RADFERN You're very masterful to-night, Dad, aren't you?
What's the matter?

RADFERN Have to assert myself sometimes, Mother

ELSIE returns a moment later, looking frightened

ELSIE Dad, it's a police sergeant and he wants to see you

RADFERN (*gravely, steadily*) All right

ELSIE (*going over to him, softly*) Dad—it's not true—after all—
is it?

RADFERN (*cheerfully*) That's all right, Elsie Ask him to come in

ELSIE is clinging to his arm

MRS RADFERN Don't be ridiculous, Elsie (*She goes and admits the sergeant, a heavily built, middle-aged man with a deep voice and a rather pompous manner*)

SERGEANT MORRIS Mr George Radfern

RADFERN (*steadily*) That's me, sergeant

SERGEANT MORRIS I think you've seen me before I'm from the
local station

RADFERN Know you well by sight

SERGEANT MORRIS I've just heard that you might be going away
soon

RADFERN That's right I'm seriously thinking of it, Sergeant

SERGEANT MORRIS Well, Mr Cross at the end house said you'd
like to be one of the patrons and vice-presidents of the new Shooters
Green Football Club

RADFERN Oh—you've come round to make sure of my sub-
scription

SERGEANT MORRIS (*reheved*) That's it, Mr Radfern Three
guineas—for a vice-president

RADFERN (*producing money*) Must be a vice-president There you
are. There's a fiver for luck

SERGEANT MORRIS (*who has been writing*) That's the official
receipt And thank you very much, Mr Radfern Good night,
mum, good night, miss Good night

*He goes out, and MRS RADFERN goes as far as the door behind
him ELSIE gives an hysterical laugh, really of relief.*

RADFERN What are you laughing at?

ACT III

LABURNUM GROVE

ELSIE I don't know Everything Oh—Dad—how long shall we be away?

RADFERN Don't know yet Four months Six months

ELSIE Oh—what about your greenhouse?

RADFERN Where we're going it'll be all greenhouse

Enter MRS RADFERN

ELSIE And what about Laburnum Grove?

MRS RADFERN (*briskly*) It'll be still here when we come back

ELSIE (*excitedly*) Let's look at all these things (*Indicating shipping booklets*)

MRS RADFERN (*firmly*) It's my turn now We don't look at anything until we've had some supper And you can help me to get it ready for once

ELSIE (*happily*) All right, mother (*Hurries into kitchen, where she can be heard singing happily*)

MRS RADFERN (*as she removes various things and cloth from table*) And you needn't tell me you haven't been up to something, you know, Dad

RADFERN (*grinning at her*) All right, Mother I needn't tell you

MRS RADFERN *is spreading a tablecloth and ELSIE entering with some supper things and RADFERN smiling at them both, as the curtain slowly descends*

END OF PLAY

BEES ON THE BOAT DECK

A Farcical Tragedy in Two Acts

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

SAM GRIDLEY, Chief Engineer, ss *Gloriana*
ROBERT PATCH, Second Officer, ss *Gloriana*
SLIVERS, a Local Shopkeeper
HILDA JACKSON, Gridley's Niece, a Children's Nurse
FRANCIS FLEATHERINGTON, a Research Chemist
LORD COTTINGLEY, a Director of Shipping Companies
HON URSULA MADDINGS, his Daughter
GASTER, Member of Communist Party
CAPT MELLOCK, a Professional Fascist
SERGEANT WILKS, of the Local Police
MR TOOKE, from Head Office

ACT I

Well deck of ss *Gloriana*, lying in backwater of Trim Estuary,
on the South Coast Morning of Midsummer Day

ACT II

The same Afternoon

Bees on the Boat Deck—Copyright, 1936, by John Boynton Priestley

First produced at the Lyric Theatre, London, on May 5th, 1936, with the following cast

SAM GRIDLEY
ROBERT PATCH
SLIVERS
HILDA JACKSON
FRANCIS FLEATHERINGTON
LORD COTTINGLEY
URSULA MADDINGS
GASTER
CAPTAIN MELLOCK
SERGEANT WILKS
MR TOOKE

RALPH RICHARDSON
LAURENCE OLIVIER
RAYMOND HUNTLEY
RENEE RAY
RICHARD GOOLDEN
ALAN JEAYES
KAY HAMMOND
JOHN LAURIE
S J WARMINGTON
ARTHUR HAMBLING
FREDERICK T COOPER

ACT I

Well deck of ss Gloriana, lying in backwater of Trum estuary

On right is superstructure, and companion-way leading to upper deck Cabin doors above and below Behind is rail, with place for gangway leading down to ground At the back are branches of trees, thick with foliage Some of these are almost over the deck On deck are a few old deck chairs and canvas folding chairs and a small table, all now pushed to one side It is midsummer and the whole scene is lit with bright sunshine

At rise, SAM GRIDLEY, a rough-looking middle-aged man, and BOB PATCH, a younger, neater and rather good-looking man, are playing deck-tennis They are wearing old flannel bags, canvas shoes and open shirts They must play properly, with PATCH winning

GRIDLEY Your game

PATCH And set Six two

GRIDLEY (*who is very hot, mopping his brow, etc*) All right Boys' game, anyhow Boys' game

They take down the net, put it away, then pull chairs forward

GRIDLEY puts on old chief-engineer's jacket before sitting down
He lights a pipe, PATCH a cigarette GRIDLEY produces small volume from his pocket

PATCH (*noticing the book*) Not What's-his-name again!

GRIDLEY (*solemnly*) Having exercised the body, now we ought to exercise the mind Schopenhauer (*He pronounces it Shoppen-hawer*)

PATCH I'm tired of him

GRIDLEY Tired of him! You haven't properly started on him yet You don't know the very beginnings of him Let me tell you, there's things in—this— (*Holding up book*)

PATCH (*wearily, but good-humouredly*) I know, I know You've told me If I'd only been there, when the *Theodosia* went down—

GRIDLEY You'd have known a lot more about life than you do now, laddie What I saw that day—

PATCH You've told me before, Sam, dozens of times They were all screaming, fighting, knocking hell out of each other to get into the boats—

GRIDLEY Human nature—and you can have it All in this book,

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

boy, all in this book First time I ever looked into it, I said, this is the chap for me (*Opens book and begins reading slowly*) "Thus between desiring and attaining all human life flows on throughout The wish is, in its nature, pain, the attainment soon begets satiety, the end was only apparent, possession takes away the charm, the wish, the need, presents itself under a new form, when it does not, then follows desolateness, emptiness "

PATCH (*interrupting*) And the sooner we're dead, the better That's what he's saying all the time, and why he takes so long to say it beats me

GRIDLEY (*solemnly*) You haven't the mind for it yet, Bob Schopenhauer——

PATCH Here, how long did *he* live?

GRIDLEY (*turning to beginning of book and reading*) Arthur Schopenhauer was born in 1788, and died in 1860

PATCH Seventy-two Well, he didn't do so badly, did he? Nicely off all the time, too, I expect Don't read me any more of that old blighter Finish!

GRIDLEY That's all right to me If you haven't the mind for it, you haven't, that's all

PATCH (*contemptuously, getting up and strolling off back right*) Mind for it!

He goes off, and GRIDLEY settles to read, slowly and solemnly He is disturbed by the arrival of MR SLIVERS, a foolish-looking, middle-aged man, who is carrying several packages

SLIVERS Good morning

GRIDLEY Morning, Mr Slivers

SLIVERS Nice morning

GRIDLEY Nice morning

SLIVERS (*coming forward*) I thought I'd bring your order here myself this morning Gets me out o' the shop, y'know, Mr Gridley Makes a change I see where it says in the paper that's what you've got to do 'Ave a change whenever possible, it says

GRIDLEY Doesn't tell you to change your paper, does it? Well, what have you brought us?

SLIVERS (*now the shopkeeper, glibly*) Dozen fresh eggs, pound o' butter, same of the usual bacon——

GRIDLEY (*looking into one of the bags*) What sort of cheese is this?

SLIVERS That's Canadian Cheddar, that is, Mr Gridley We're just out o' the other, but you'll find this very nice—very nice A lot of people speak highly of that Canadian Cheddar——

GRIDLEY (*sceptically*) What people?

SLIVERS Customers of mine, very nice people (*Handing over package of tobacco*) And two ounces of *Hearts of Oak* That'll set you up, won't it, Mr Gridley You like your pipe, don't you?

GRIDLEY Yes

SLIVERS (*idiotically*) That's right Wish I could manage one Always burns my tongue Now, Mr Gridley, will you tell me something?

GRIDLEY Anything, Mr Slivers Just ask me, and I'll tell you Here, put that stuff down

They put packages down SLIVERS *sits*

Now what is it?

SLIVERS (*earnestly*) You're not kidding me, are you?

GRIDLEY Kidding you? What do you mean?

SLIVERS About you—and this ship—and everything

GRIDLEY (*calling*) Bob

PATCH (*off, right back*) Yes?

GRIDLEY (*calling*) He's at it again Won't believe us

SLIVERS Now, Mr Gridley, did I say that? But I just wondered——

PATCH enters *He looks cool and neat now, is wearing a tie with his soft shirt, but no coat* *He is smoking a cigarette*

PATCH Morning

SLIVERS Morning Nice morning

PATCH I bet you saw that in the paper

SLIVERS (*seriously*) No, but I see where it says there's a 'eat wave on the way

PATCH Shouldn't be surprised Now what's this about you calling us a couple of liars?

SLIVERS I never did I thought you might 'ave been pulling my leg, that's all

PATCH What should we want to pull your leg for?

GRIDLEY You haven't got the sort of leg he likes to pull

PATCH That'll do, Sam (*To SLIVERS*) Now listen, this is a ship And she's a good ship—or she was

GRIDLEY Still is I don't want a better one

PATCH Ten thousand tons She cost—what did she cost, Sam?

GRIDLEY At least three hundred and fifty thousand pounds

SLIVERS Ah—that's money, that is

GRIDLEY That was Built only in 1919 Economic speed—four—

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teen knots And we have pushed her up to sixteen and a half And she used to run, regular as clockwork, London to Cape Town, Cape Town to Durban, Durban to Melbourne, Melbourne to Sydney, Sydney to Wellington, carrying anything and anybody you wanted, as sweet and pretty as you please

PATCH And—get this, once and for all—for the last two years she was running, Sam Gridley here was chief engineer, and I was second officer No deception All perfectly straightforward Meet the chief of the *Gloriana* Meet the second officer Nobody's kidding you We're not a couple of out-of-work bookies' clerks We're not trying to sell linoleum This isn't a caravan You're talking now to two officers of His Majesty's Mercantile Marine We've served apprenticeships We've passed examinations—all kinds of bloody examinations We've got certificates to prove it

SLIVERS (*rather dazed*) Yes, I expect you have

GRIDLEY And this ship's lying here, useless and rusting her guts out, because the White Albion Line that owns her is—like most of the shipping companies—in Queer Street They can't afford to run her, see? She can't pay for herself, with trade as it is

SLIVERS Yes, but trade's better I see where it says in the paper the depression's over Britain back to normal, it says Prosperity, it says, on the way

PATCH (*savagely*) Yes, but you see, this ship's stupid It doesn't read the paper It doesn't know anything about that We don't either We're just a couple of dam' fools, you see

GRIDLEY Steady, boy, steady Take it easy with Mr Slivers He's friendly (*Patting SLIVERS on shoulder*) Aren't you, Mr Slivers?

SLIVERS That's right, Mr Gridley Only you see—I couldn't help wondering

GRIDLEY You did right to wonder You keep on wondering If a chap isn't going to wonder nowadays, when the hell is he going to wonder? Tell me that

PATCH Only stop wondering about us We explained it all before

SLIVERS Yes, but you see, there's some ships like this in the estuary, half a dozen of 'em between Biddington and Longport, and they just have a watchman on board

GRIDLEY Well, we're the watchmen here, see? They couldn't find us any berths, and neither could anybody else, so here we are. Seeing that nobody steals the ship

SLIVERS But why is she up here in this backwater, and not out there with the others?

PATCH Because the fellow that brought her in here was crazy Or perhaps he liked a bit of quiet fun Anyhow, he rammed her in here, and it's my opinion the *Queen Mary* herself couldn't pull her out

GRIDLEY We could get her out, if she was wanted

PATCH Never Couldn't be done She's here till she rusts to pieces Unless they'd like to dig her out and then put wheels under her and call her a roadhouse

SLIVERS She does look a bit funny here, doesn't she?

PATCH Funny my foot! She doesn't make me want to laugh She makes me want to cry Look at them—trees And this is a ship Next year, if we're not careful it'll be a ruddy farm They'll be hay-making, here

GRIDLEY I was up on the boat deck earlier on, Bob Do you know what we've got there now—up on the boat deck, mind you? (*Very loudly*) Bees It's a fact Bees on the boat deck

PATCH (*to Slivers*) Now have a good laugh

SLIVERS (*after pause, tactfully changing subject*) Er—they tell me there was a bit of a rumpus down at Longport last night There's a by-election there, y'know

GRIDLEY No, I didn't know

SLIVERS Oh yes Parliamentary by-election all right Five candidates, including a Red, proper Communist he is, and a sort of Fascist chap It was the Reds and these Fascists that had a set-to last night, they tell me Neither of them'll get in, though Too extreme The good sense of the Longport voter will see to that

PATCH You've got that bit out of the paper too The good sense of the Longport voter! Gert-cher!

SLIVERS And I see where it says in the paper the Duke of Blandshire—he's got a big place about fifteen miles away from here—is giving up two of his houses——

PATCH (*sardonically*) No!

SLIVERS Yes, can't keep them up, it says, owing to heavy taxation It's hard lines, I say I'm sorry for the Duke

GRIDLEY So am I, Mr Slivers It just breaks my heart to think about him, struggling on

SLIVERS Well, he's got his responsibilities, hasn't he? We wouldn't like it And after all he's got a big stake in the country

PATCH Yes, and a lot of chips too, I'll bet Well, what's the rest of the news? I can see you've had a good crack at the paper this morning

SLIVERS Oh—that Meddleworth case—you know, about who's

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to keep the little boy—is held up One of the chief witnesses has disappeared

PATCH Meddleworth case? Don't know anything about it Do you, Sam?

GRIDLEY (*who has been busy with his pipe*) No, don't know and don't care

SLIVERS Oh—it's a big sensation Lot of goings on coming out Papers are running it hard All disgusting, y'know—but very spicy

GRIDLEY That'll suit you, Bob You like it spicy

PATCH Got a paper with you?

As SLIVERS hands one over, from his pocket

Thanks (*Begins unfolding it*)

GRIDLEY Save me the cricket page, Bob

PATCH (*now burying himself in paper*) Right

GRIDLEY (*heartily*) Now I'll tell you what I will do, Mr Slivers, just to show you there's no ill-feeling If you like, you shall come below with me, and I'll let you have a peep at as neat a geared turbine job as you can ever hope to see

SLIVERS Engines, eh?

GRIDLEY Yes, and engines that 'ud be ready to take you and all the other people in Biddington—yes, and all their tables and chairs and beds and bits o' things—from here to Peru next Saturday Ready? By God, they're aching to be off again Every time I go down I hear 'em whispering "What about it, Sam, what about it? Come on, let's go, Sam, let's go" And you won't read about that in the paper This way

He holds one of the doors open SLIVERS rises, and they both go out PATCH is reading, but is apparently disturbed by an insect, for he puts paper down, impatiently brushes something away, looks anxiously about him, then finally settles down again HILDA JACKSON rather slowly and timidly boards the ship She is a pleasant-looking girl about twenty-five, quietly and neatly dressed She is carrying a very small case Her manner should suggest a person of decent steady nerves who has lately been harassed almost into hysteria, she is using all her self-control PATCH does not see or hear her, as she quietly comes forward She looks at him hesitantly She cannot see his face

HILDA (*timidly*) Er——

PATCH (*looking up, surprised*) Hello!

HILDA (*timidly*) Good morning

PATCH (*getting up, staring at her in puzzled fashion, then taking up newspaper and looking at that, then looking again at her*) That's funny

HILDA (*timidly*) Yes

PATCH What do you mean, "Yes"?

HILDA (*dismally*) You see—I know what you're thinking

PATCH Oh?

HILDA Yes It is me—there in the paper

PATCH (*surprised*) It is?

HILDA Yes

To his astonishment, she now suddenly bursts into tears

PATCH (*sympathetic but embarrassed*) I say, what's the matter? You mustn't do that

HILDA (*through her sobs*) I'm sorry But—I—can't help it

PATCH (*fussing with her*) No, of course not That's all right But what's wrong, what's the matter? Look here, sit down first Must sit down (*Makes her sit down*) There, that's better, isn't it?

HILDA (*trying to smile through her tears*) Yes But I want my uncle

PATCH (*completely puzzled by this*) Oh—you want your uncle

HILDA Yes

PATCH (*regarding her with a mixture of pity and suspicion, obviously concluding that she is a bit mad*) Well—we'll have to—see what we can do Only—don't cry That's no good You'll never get your uncle that way Have—er—a cigarette

HILDA (*drying herself*) No, thank you I don't smoke

PATCH (*ready to say anything now*) I don't blame you, I don't blame you at all Pretty warm, isn't it?

HILDA Yes But I don't mind it

PATCH No, I don't Rather like it, in fact Now—er—about your uncle—

HILDA (*alarmed*) He's still here, isn't he?

PATCH Still here—your uncle? (*As the light dawns*) I say—you don't mean Sam—Sam Gridley?

HILDA Yes He's my uncle

PATCH (*almost shouting in his relief*). Well—for the love of Pete! And Sam's your uncle Old Sam! Good old Sam! Yes, he's here

HILDA (*tremendously relieved*) Oh—thank goodness!

PATCH And I'm Bob Patch—used to be second officer with him in this ship We're looking after her together

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HILDA Yes, I know And I've come here—to hide

PATCH Then you really are the girl—the nurse—in that Meddleworth case—the one who's disappeared

HILDA (*in very low voice*) Yes—I'm Hilda Jackson

PATCH Well, I'll be—hanged! Here are you, Sam's niece—and the papers are full of you and I expect they're talking about you all over the place——

HILDA (*in low voice*) Yes, they are

PATCH And yet old Sam's never said a word Not one word D'you know, I don't believe he knows anything about the case, never heard of it Honestly It 'ud be just like him Never knows what's going on Doesn't care And here you are—his niece

HILDA (*hesitantly*) Yes Do you think—I can stay here?

PATCH Certainly you can stay here Just the very place They'll never find you here Hardly anybody ever comes here anyhow And this is the last place they'd think of looking for you Of course you can stay (*Pauses*) Might have to make yourself useful, y'know

HILDA (*eagerly*) Oh yes—I always like to do that

PATCH Fine Can you cook?

HILDA Yes—I'm rather a good cook And I love it

PATCH Then you're just what we want D'you know, I haven't tasted a pudding for weeks and weeks and weeks, and I'm very fond of puddings

HILDA What a shame! But isn't it rather too hot for puddings?

PATCH (*seriously*) It's never too hot for a *good* pudding Could you do a baked jam roll?

HILDA (*smiling*) Yes, I think so

PATCH Couldn't be better Old Sam likes baked jam roll, too We've talked a lot about it lately, because we used to have a cook in this ship who was quite a fair hand at baked jam roll Well, well, well, I call this a stroke of luck I say, are you tired? How did you get here?

HILDA (*confidentially*) I stayed last night with a girl I know—in a little place between Portsmouth and Winchester Then, early this morning, I got a bus half-way to Longport, then another bus there, and then another bus from Longport to that village—Biddington You see, I thought it was safer going by bus than by train

PATCH I'll bet you're right, too They may be watching the stations You never know

HILDA Do you think it's wrong for me to run away, like this?

PATCH (*stoutly*) No, I don't If you've had enough of it, why should they make you go on with it? After all, it's really nothing to do with you, who has the kid You stay here We'll see you're all right

Enter GRIDLEY and SLIVERS, who stares at HILDA

GRIDLEY (*astonished*) Aren't you—Hilda?

PATCH (*before anybody else has time to do anything*) Hoy, let me do this Mr Slivers, allow me to introduce my cousin, Miss Matilda—er—Robinson

HILDA (*nervously*) How d'you do?

SLIVERS (*never taking his eyes off her, suspiciously*) Pleased to meet you Very pleased

PATCH (*heartily*) Well, what do you think of our engines?

SLIVERS (*still staring*) Very interesting (*Suddenly, triumphantly, pointing at HILDA*) I know who you are That's it Miss Hilda Jackson—the missing witness in the Meddleworth Case You can't deny it, can you?

HILDA (*dismayed*) No

GRIDLEY What's all this about?

PATCH (*to GRIDLEY*) Just a minute (*To others*) Now then——

HILDA (*eagerly, to SLIVERS*) Please don't tell anybody you've seen me here, please You can't understand how awful it's been for me If I could have done anything for Hugh—the little boy—I'd have stayed, but they took him away and—— (*She shows signs of breaking down again*)

SLIVERS (*who is still staring at her, rather triumphantly*) Yes, but—er—I mean to say, you're one of the chief witnesses, aren't you? And it says in the paper——

PATCH (*who has been casting unfriendly glances at SLIVERS*) Just a minute, Mr Slivers (*Goes up to him*) I'd like to explain this to you (*Dropping his voice, very confidentially*) There's a lot of things about this business you don't understand yet, see? We'll just go along here and I'll explain (*As he leads him off, towards cabins*) Can't talk properly here, see?

They go off right GRIDLEY looks at HILDA in astonishment

GRIDLEY This beats me! I don't know anything about this Meddleworth case Where d'you come into it, Hilda?

HILDA I was the little boy's nurse You knew I was a children's nurse, didn't you?

GRIDLEY Yes, your mother told me that much But what are these Meddleworths and why are you a witness?

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HILDA They're separated And they're very rich important people, you see, uncle And Sir Eric Meddleworth had the boy—it was he who gave me the job—and then his wife, Lady Meddleworth, wanted Hugh, and tried to take him away And then they went to law, and each one said the other wasn't fit to have the boy—and they were trying to prove the most horrible things about each other——

GRIDLEY (*with grim satisfaction*) Most of 'em true too, I'll be bound

HILDA And then the papers took it up——

GRIDLEY I remember They were just talking about it this morning Spicy!

HILDA It's not spicy It's just horrible, dirty And I was in the middle of it—and they were always wanting to take my photograph——

GRIDLEY You didn't mind that Come now Never heard of a girl who didn't want her photograph in the papers

HILDA Yes, but not mixed up with all this dirt and nastiness And the reporters wouldn't leave me alone And in the court, they asked me the most awful questions—and wouldn't let me answer back properly—as good as told me I was a liar—and they'd taken Hugh away—and I couldn't stand it any longer Uncle, I couldn't Not another day of it I'd have gone mad—had a breakdown—or something Uncle, you do understand, don't you? (*She goes up to him*)

GRIDLEY (*patting her on the shoulder*) Yes, yes, that's all right You keep out of it, if you want to Damn their eyes, I say Yes, damn their eyes!

HILDA I thought if I came here for a day or two, they wouldn't find me——

GRIDLEY Don't see why they should You stay here

HILDA And I can cook

GRIDLEY Puddings?

HILDA (*smiling*) Yes Jam roll too

GRIDLEY You stay here We'll look after you (*He sees PATCH returning alone*) Won't we, Bob? I say, we'll look after her

PATCH Yes We've just started

GRIDLEY Where's Slivers?

PATCH (*casually*) I've locked him in Cabin A. He'll be all right He's got his paper

GRIDLEY (*staring*) What have you done that for?

PATCH Had to. If we'd let him go, he'd have told everybody she was here In half an hour the police 'ud have been here for her

GRIDLEY *stares at PATCH, then at HILDA, in amazement*

HILDA It's true I knew he was going to tell I could see it in his eyes

PATCH Trust him! Well, he won't blab while he's in there

GRIDLEY, *rubbing his chin, slowly sits down*

HILDA (*troubled*) But what are we to do? You can't keep him there long

PATCH We can keep him long enough to give us time to think—and you time to have a rest That's enough to be going on with

GRIDLEY Well, it's plenty to be going on with (*He whistles an ascending scale meditatively* PATCH *answers it whistling a descending scale derisively*) I call this a morning

PATCH (*coolly*) It's time something happened here

GRIDLEY Where's the key of that cabin?

PATCH In my pocket Why? You're not thinking of letting the little blighter out, are you?

GRIDLEY (*dubiously*) No, not if he's going to run and tell the police about Hilda here Certainly not But we might make him promise——

PATCH Promise! I wouldn't trust him ten yards He'd let it out even if he didn't want to Hasn't the sense to keep it to himself Him and his papers! Forget about him Take it easy

HILDA (*dreamily*) I'd like to forget about everything for an hour or two, at least

PATCH (*grinning at her*) And you're going to

GRIDLEY Certainly, certainly Take it easy, girl You're all right now

HILDA *stretches out in her chair luxuriously* *The other two also relax* *The scene is very peaceful* *They speak easily and quietly*

HILDA You don't know how wonderful it is just to rest—and be quiet

PATCH Quiet enough here Too quiet

GRIDLEY (*to HILDA*) He wants Oxford Street and Piccadilly Circus, that's what he wants Palladiums and Corner Houses and what not Jazz bands and girls

PATCH (*hastily*) Not girls

GRIDLEY (*tactlessly*) Well, you've talked enough about 'em All colours of girls

PATCH (*who does not want HILDA to hear this, and sees that she is listening carefully*) Never! But a place can be too quiet, that's all

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HILDA (*dreamily*) Not for me it can't—just now This is perfect
So peaceful

As her voice trails off into silence, there is the sound of a terrific explosion off right Mingled with this is the noise of trees cracking, and this continues after the actual explosion A shower of twigs falls on the deck, followed by a number of tiny twigs and a shower of leaves HILDA gives a scream, the two men a shout Then, in the silence, GRIDLEY whistles his scale and PATCH answers it HILDA has risen from her chair The two men rush to the rail now and look in the direction of the explosion

PATCH There's a fellow there See! (*Shouting to him*) Hoy!

GRIDLEY I don't see him Ah yes, there he is (*Shouting*) Hoy!

HILDA joins them

HILDA Oh—look! I believe he's hurt himself

PATCH I'll see

He hurries ashore GRIDLEY and HILDA look anxious and vaguely helpful, but do not leave the ship

HILDA But what can have happened, uncle?

GRIDLEY Looks to me as if he's been trying to blow a few trees up

HILDA But why should he do that?

GRIDLEY Well—one thing or another—I dunno Nowadays, they're just as likely to be blowing up trees as doing anything else Don't ask me to make sense of it I can't do it

HILDA (*looking down*) Here they are

GRIDLEY (*shouting*) Can you manage him? Is he bad? Oh—all right

HILDA Poor man! But I don't think he's badly hurt

GRIDLEY Looks too pleased with himself What's he got to be pleased about? Impossible to make sense of anything!

PATCH returns supporting FLEATHERINGTON with one hand and carrying in the other a small bag FLEATHERINGTON is between forty and fifty, with the thin eager face of an unworldly student, and a gentle high voice He has apparently been knocked down by the explosion He is cut and bruised in a few places, rather dirty, and his clothes have been damaged But he is smiling

FLEATHERINGTON Good morning I'm afraid I've been rather a nuisance.

GRIDLEY Was that your explosion?

FLEATHERINGTON (*smiling*) Yes

GRIDLEY Then you're right You have been a nuisance

FLEATHERINGTON I'm awfully sorry (*To HILDA*) I hope you weren't alarmed?

HILDA No—not much But—you're bleeding

FLEATHERINGTON Oh, nothing—mere scratches, thank you

HILDA (*rather severely*) You ought to have those cuts cleaned If I could have some water and a clean cloth and some iodine——

PATCH I'll find them for you Come with me I'd better chuck this bag down somewhere

FLEATHERINGTON Put it down rather carefully, please

GRIDLEY Here, what's in that bag?

FLEATHERINGTON (*coolly*) The high explosive I was testing and——

GRIDLEY Steady with that bag, Bob Don't drop it

HILDA has recoiled in alarm PATCH is regarding the bag he still holds with marked distaste

FLEATHERINGTON (*taking the bag*) Allow me

PATCH and HILDA go out rather hurriedly FLEATHERINGTON sits down and opens the bag GRIDLEY watches him anxiously

There's no danger from the explosive itself You can kick it about, hammer it, do what you like, it won't go off That's one of its great advantages But I have some detonators here—— (*He produces a small package*) and they're very sensitive Not powerful, of course But if they're handled carelessly, they can take off an arm or a leg quite nicely Where shall I put them?

GRIDLEY Can't you throw 'em overboard?

FLEATHERINGTON (*apologetically*) I'd rather not do that, you know They'd explode at once and that would be a waste of good detonators I'll put them here—— (*Moves across to some likely place*) You see, it's as well to have them away from the explosive itself

GRIDLEY Yes And for God's sake, see that nobody touches 'em.

FLEATHERINGTON (*smiling gently, returning to his chair*) This explosive in the bag is a little discovery of mine I'm a research chemist and I've been working on nitro compounds Always very amusing, I think, all these coal tar derivatives You never know what you're going to turn up—a new perfume, perhaps, a new dye, or, like this, a new explosive——

GRIDLEY (*grimly*) We're out o' luck here I wish it 'ud been a new perfume or a new dye

FLEATHERINGTON I made a pound or two of this explosive—they're in crystal form—at the lab, and when we came down here for our holidays, I brought the stuff with me—to try it out

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

GRIDLEY (*grimly*) You have to have a bit o' fun on your holidays, haven't you?

FLEATHERINGTON (*unaware of the irony*) Exactly I've called the stuff—temporarily, anyhow—*Fletherite* You see, my name's Fletherington So—*Fletherite* Rather egoistical, perhaps— (*he smiles apologetically*)—but I think it's excusable, don't you? My wife, a very sensible woman in some respects, seemed to think so

GRIDLEY (*who can't make this fellow out, rubbing his chin*) Oh—yes—I wouldn't let a little thing like that worry you So long as you can blow everything up nicely

FLEATHERINGTON As to that, I'm very pleased indeed—

Here HILDA and PATCH return, carrying basin of water, soap, cloth, towel and bottle of iodine, and some sticking plaster During the dialogue that follows, HILDA is busy washing, drying, iodining and sticking-plastering his cuts and bruises She should be very brisk and business-like, and handle him as if he were a rather naughty little boy, occasionally reprimanding him, as he winces or moves, with a "Now then——!"

Oh, this is very kind of you, though you needn't have troubled I must introduce myself Fletherington, Francis Fletherington Research chemist

GRIDLEY My niece, Miss Jackson This is Mr Patch, second officer in this ship I'm Gridley, chief engineer

FLEATHERINGTON (*amiably, though inconvenienced by the first-aid*) I was just telling Mr Gridley about this new explosive of mine, *Fletherite* I only used a pinch of it—made a tiny bomb—down there, and the result was most satisfactory—

HILDA It was beastly And look at you!

FLEATHERINGTON (*smiling*) That's the point I grossly underestimated its power Otherwise I shouldn't have been so near I'm quite used to working with powerful high-explosives, of course It completely deceived me Most gratifying

PATCH I suppose if you'd blown yourself to bits, you'd have been highly delighted

HILDA Don't! It's so horrible It seemed such a lovely morning too

FLEATHERINGTON It's a beautiful morning, isn't it? I think we're going to be lucky with our holiday this year My wife says I always choose the worst weather This time she can't say it, can she?

HILDA Is your wife with you?

FLEATHERINGTON Yes, we're in rooms at a farm about five miles away Very pleasant indeed

HILDA (*busy finishing him off*) I can't understand why she lets you go about blowing things up like that There! You look better now

FLEATHERINGTON I'm really much obliged, Miss—er—Jackson, and so sorry to have caused all this trouble

PATCH (*offering case*) Cigarette?

FLEATHERINGTON (*taking one*) Thank you I don't often smoke, but I think this is quite an occasion for a little self-indulgence

PATCH *offers him match, and he lights the cigarette awkwardly*

PATCH *lights his own* FLEATHERINGTON *leans back and beams upon the company*

Well, this is very pleasant, very pleasant indeed

PATCH (*after a meaning glance at HILDA and GRIDLEY*) Mr Fletherington, do you read the papers?

FLEATHERINGTON Very rarely My wife reads them and then tells me any news that she thinks I would like to hear This pleases her, and saves time and trouble for me Besides, from what I can see, the popular press appears to be produced now for women, not men

GRIDLEY I believe you're right Except for the sports pages Cricket news

FLEATHERINGTON I don't take any interest in cricket I like to relax when I've done my work for the day

HILDA, *assisted by PATCH, begins to put the first-aid things together*

Oh, can I help?

HILDA Oh—no, thank you (*To PATCH*) You needn't bother now, either I like to be doing something It's very restful

HILDA *goes out with the things*

FLEATHERINGTON Very sensible girl, that My wife would like her

FLEATHERINGTON *leans back in content* PATCH *goes and lounges by the rail at the back*

Very odd finding oneself on a ship, like this (*Looks about him with approval*) Do you know what I'd like to do with this ship?

GRIDLEY (*lazily*) No

FLEATHERINGTON (*smiling*) I'd like to try a charge of my Fletherite on it Blow it up

GRIDLEY (*hastily*) Don't be silly—

FLEATHERINGTON (*seriously*) No, no, it's just what I want Wonderful test Here's a fairly compact rigid steel structure, with excellent resistance On the basis of my little experiment down there, I believe I could work out a charge of Fletherite—or perhaps two charges,

detonated simultaneously—that would blow up this ship very neatly

GRIDLEY (*heatedly*) And a damn fine thing that would be, wouldn't it? A beautiful job of work like this—planned and executed to the last inch—capable of doing her fourteen knots to-morrow from here to Honolulu—and you talk about blowing her up!

FLEATHERINGTON (*blandly*) But why not? She's no use to you or anybody else, whereas she's just what I need—to try my explosive on

GRIDLEY She's no use here But that's because she oughtn't to be here Wasn't meant to be here She ought to be out at sea, doing her work——

A whistle from PATCH interrupts him PATCH is looking out
What's the matter?

PATCH More people Fellow and a girl I'll tell Hilda to keep out of the way

He hurries off right

FLEATHERINGTON Why should Hild—that nice, helpful girl, I suppose—keep out of the way?

GRIDLEY (*confused*) Oh—well—likes to keep out of the way Shy! That's what she is Trouble with all our family Shy!

FLEATHERINGTON I can sympathise with her I'm shy

GRIDLEY You're not Going round blowing things up! Talking about blowing this ship up!

He looks at the bag containing the explosive longingly, as if wanting to get rid of it Then as he makes a move towards the ship's side, LORD COTTINGLEY arrives on deck, he is a robust, well-nourished, middle-aged man, with an easy genial manner He is very well dressed, in tweeds

LORD COTTINGLEY Good morning Beautiful morning, isn't it? I think we've met before, haven't we? (*Shaking hands with the rather dazed GRIDLEY*) Aren't you one of the Company's officers?

GRIDLEY Yes, sir Gridley Chief engineer

LORD COTTINGLEY Of course, of course I'm Lord Cottingley One of your directors up to a few weeks ago, when I resigned Well, well, so this is the old *Gloriana*, eh? (*Advances towards FLEATHERINGTON, and shakes him by the hand*) How d'you do, my dear sir? You look as if you've been in the wars

FLEATHERINGTON Very old wars The people who have been in the new wars are going to look a lot worse than this

GRIDLEY This is Mr Fletherington He's been trying to blow himself up, and he'd like to blow the rest of us up now

LORD COTTINGLEY Ha ha, really! You must tell me about that
But where's my daughter? I came here with a daughter (*Goes towards
back and begins calling*) Ursula Ursula

URSULA'S VOICE (*off, back*) All right I'm crawling up

*She arrives, a handsome, weary girl, very beautifully dressed
She looks about her in disgust*

My God! Cot, what a foul boat!

GRIDLEY *stares at her in indignation*

LORD COTTINGLEY My daughter, gentlemen——

URSULA (*giving them a cursory glance Disgusted*) How d'you
do? (*To LORD COTTINGLEY*) I thought you said this might be
amusing

LORD COTTINGLEY Well, so it might

URSULA Couldn't be I'm going

PATCH *enters She brightens up at the sight of him*

That is, when you want to go There's no hurry (*To PATCH*) Hello!

PATCH (*not interested*) Hello! (*Exchanges meaning glances with
GRIDLEY*)

URSULA (*piqued at his lack of interest*) I suppose you'd be awfully
bored if I asked you to show me over the ship?

PATCH I expect you're right

URSULA (*astonished*) What?

PATCH I never contradict a lady

URSULA (*disgusted*) Lady!

PATCH (*grinning*) Sorry!

URSULA I shall go and look round myself (*Moving*)

GRIDLEY (*alarmed*) You wouldn't like it Dirty Rats——

PATCH Mice Spiders Beetles——

As she takes no notice

GRIDLEY (*hurriedly*) We'd better show you what there is to see
Very little——

*As she moves off right, they are at each side of her, carefully shep-
herding her LORD COTTINGLEY and FLEATHERINGTON, who have
been talking quietly, can now be heard*

LORD COTTINGLEY (*very genially*) Well, that's very interesting,
very interesting indeed I might be able to help you put your explo-
sive on the market That is, of course, if I were satisfied that it was
all you think it is

FLEATHERINGTON (*wistfully*) I'd like to try it on this ship——

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

LORD COTTINGLEY (*thoughtfully*) Would you now, would you? On this ship

FLEATHERINGTON (*deamly*) A beautiful test

LORD COTTINGLEY (*thoughtfully*) Oh, magnificent, of course! Just what you want

FLEATHERINGTON Yes And you'd see for yourself then

LORD COTTINGLEY Exactly And if it was *my* ship, you could do it That is, of course, if the thing were done in such a way that the insurance people didn't object, but paid up afterwards I couldn't exactly give you a ship this size to blow up, could I? (*Laughs heartily*)

FLEATHERINGTON No, I suppose not Though it might as well be blown up, it doesn't seem to be serving any useful purpose here

LORD COTTINGLEY Oh, quite, quite, quite Very sharp of you to see that You'd have a very good head for business, you know

FLEATHERINGTON I've often thought so, but I'm not interested, don't really understand it In fact, I let my wife, who's a very sensible woman in some respects, manage all our little business affairs at home I find my own work very engrossing

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smoothly*) Naturally You're a man of science I've had a certain amount to do with men of science—inventive geniuses like yourself—and I've always found it better for everybody if they just get on with their own work and don't bother their heads about business They've always left that to me, and it's worked very well A natural division of labour After all, this is an age of specialisation

FLEATHERINGTON Not so much as people think Take inorganic chemistry——

LORD COTTINGLEY (*who will not have this*) Yes, you're right there, of course We mustn't overlook that But—er—(*dropping voice*) about this ship Now, a wire to my broker in town, and I could find myself owner of this ship within twenty-four hours You say you have the explosive here with you?

FLEATHERINGTON Yes—in this bag

LORD COTTINGLEY (*drawing back*) Oh—here Dangerous isn't it?

FLEATHERINGTON No, it has to be detonated The detonators are over there It wouldn't take long to fix up a couple of charges

LORD COTTINGLEY (*thoughtfully*) Yes Quite so Well now, if I happened to own the ship—and then if you happened to fix up a couple of charges, as you say, and then somebody happened to come along and blew up the ship——

FLEATHERINGTON (*eagerly*) Oh, but I'd have to be here myself to

see what happened Otherwise it wouldn't be a proper test at all
You'd want to see it too

LORD COTTINGLEY (*slowly*) No That wouldn't be absolutely necessary In fact, it might be better if I wasn't here What we want is somebody—well—somebody who *wants* to blow a ship up—makes no bones about it—

URSULA *comes hurrying in*

Eh, what? What's the matter, Ursula?

URSULA (*amused*) This is getting better There's a man locked in a cabin along there

LORD COTTINGLEY Nonsense! Are you sure?

URSULA Positive, my dear I stood just outside—after giving those two men the slip—I knew there was something queer going on—and I heard him kicking the door and shouting

FLEATHERINGTON You're sure it wasn't a girl? Because there is one here Nice girl Can't remember her name, but she very kindly attended to these little cuts of mine

URSULA (*amused*) A girl! That explains the good-looking boy I thought he was very distant He's got a girl here Good idea too! But that was a man in the cabin

LORD COTTINGLEY Show me the cabin (*To FLEATHERINGTON*) Don't you come You need a rest Look after your explosive

LORD COTTINGLEY and URSULA *hurry off right, into super-structure*

FLEATHERINGTON *picks up his bag, opens it, and is beginning to examine his explosive crystals, when GRIDLEY and PATCH hurry in, looking hot and worried, from another entrance right*

GRIDLEY Have you seen that damned girl?

FLEATHERINGTON (*calmly*) Just gone in there with her father To show him a cabin with a man inside it

PATCH (*after whistling*) That's torn it

GRIDLEY Yes, and what the blinking blazes are we going to do to mend it? (*To FLEATHERINGTON, who is still examining his crystals*) And don't mess about with that stuff

FLEATHERINGTON (*smiling*) Perfectly safe

GRIDLEY That's what *you* say, but I don't think you know what's safe and what isn't safe Look at you! So, for God's sake, stop messing with the stuff Put it back

FLEATHERINGTON, *still smiling, does*
They can't let Slivers out, can they?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PATCH No, I've got the key in my pocket But by this time Slivers will have told 'em all about Hilda through the keyhole

GRIDLEY May not have done Better wait and see (*Sits down and mops himself and breathes heavily*) What a morning! This comes of wanting something to happen, grumbling because it's quiet (*Shouting*) I like it quiet It can't be too quiet for me If only this ship was out at sea, where she ought to be, and the engines turning over nicely and not too many passengers, I'd ask for nothing better I wouldn't care how quiet it was, wouldn't care if not a damn thing happened for six months

PATCH Well, you're out of luck, Sam It'll be a long time before this old girl goes churning through the Forties again

FLEATHERINGTON Lord Cottingley was talking just now about buying her

PATCH Oh, what does that old twister want to do with her?

GRIDLEY Wait a minute, you can't talk like that How d'you know he's a twister?

PATCH Ask any of 'em at Head Office They're all twisters more or less there, but he was the king twister and that's why he had to resign What's he want to buy her for? I don't trust him

FLEATHERINGTON He's interested in my explosive, Fletherite

GRIDLEY (*half humorously, half angrily*) He is, is he? I suppose he's like you, eh? Like to try it on the ship, blow her up?

FLEATHERINGTON (*simply*) Yes, that's what he said

GRIDLEY (*exploding*) What the——

Then he stares at PATCH and in his exasperation whistles his ascending scale, while PATCH, staring back, whistles his descending one

Either I've gone clean off my nut, or everybody else has this morning Where's the sense of it? Now here's a ship—and when I say a ship, I mean a ship—not something you can put together in a morning, not some blankety little tuppenny ha'penny gadget, a wireless set or a gramophone, but a *Ship*—and if she was a ruddy beehive——

PATCH (*sardonically*) She *is* a beehive Didn't you tell me there were bees up on the boat deck this morning——?

GRIDLEY (*explosively*) Bees there, and bees in our bonnets We're all going mad I can feel it coming Now here's a ship——

PATCH You've said that before, you old chump Listen Come here

They come down to talk confidentially FLEATHERINGTON makes no attempt to listen but remains aloof and dreamy

Don't you see what the game is?

GRIDLEY No, I don't

PATCH Well, it's the good old game Insurance

GRIDLEY Insurance?

PATCH Yes, insurance Cottingley could buy this ship for next to nothing now But if anything happens to her—total loss—he could collect the insurance, see?

GRIDLEY D'you think that's it?

PATCH I'm sure I don't know whether it could be worked, but that's what's in his mind, you can bet your life

GRIDLEY But what about him? (*Indicating FLEATHERINGTON*) Is that his idea, too?

PATCH No, he's just barmy He wants to blow something up

GRIDLEY (*with an angry glance at FLEATHERINGTON, gradually raising his voice*) And he doesn't care what it is Blow anything up St Paul's Cathedral Children's Hospital Yes, I'm talking about you, Mr Fletherington

FLEATHERINGTON (*mildly*) And what's the matter with me?

GRIDLEY Everything You're all wrong You're a nuisance You're a menace

FLEATHERINGTON I'm not I'm simply a chemist, a scientist

GRIDLEY (*bellowing*) I know, I know, and to-day you're trying to blow us up, and to-morrow you'll be trying to dose us with poison gas What do you want to go and make the foul stuff for, eh? Before you've finished, you fellows'll do the lot of us in

FLEATHERINGTON (*defensively*) All I do is to research——

GRIDLEY Yes, and look at the result Blowing us up, burning us alive, poisoning us Just stop your damned research then

FLEATHERINGTON Certainly not I'm very distressed to hear you talking like this, Mr Gridley I've never willingly hurt anybody in my life

GRIDLEY No, and that's what makes it all so cock-eyed and crazy You don't want to hurt anybody, but—by God!—you're going to Look what you've started here this morning I'm going to find out what those people are up to (*Stamps off same way as LORD COTTINGLEY and URSULA went*)

FLEATHERINGTON I'm very sorry indeed, Mr —er——

PATCH Patch Patch

FLEATHERINGTON Patch, that Mr Gridley should think of me in this way——

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PATCH All right, never mind Sam's very touchy, these days After all, he's a chief engineer, not a watchman Breaks his heart to be stuck like this in a ship that's half a market garden You can't even see the sea from here And he's having a worrying morning And I'm having a worrying morning Only I don't mind it so much (*With abrupt change of tone*) What do you think of that girl?

FLEATHERINGTON Lord Cottingley's daughter——?

PATCH No, I wouldn't have her given Seen too many bits like her Not so high-class, of course, but with just the same carry on No, I mean the other one—Sam's niece—Miss Jackson Now there is a girl——

FLEATHERINGTON Very nice type Where is she?

PATCH Hiding out of the way—up in the captain's quarters, I think I'd better go and see how she's getting on——

Turns away, but stops because he sees a new arrival, GASTER
He is a man about forty, rather tall and very thin, with the long thin neck and prominent Adam's apple of so many revolutionaries
He has rather Jewish clean-shaven features, curlyish greying hair, thick but bald in the centre, wears no hat, and is dressed in a darkish suit with no waistcoat and a rough sort of a shirt He can wear spectacles He has a high querulous voice He comes aboard with a rather self-important, mysterious air

GASTER (*to* PATCH) Good morning, Comrade

PATCH Morning

GASTER One of the party in Longport——

PATCH What party?

GASTER The Communist Party He told me about this ship lying up here, and as you probably know, we're fighting a by-election in Longport and also working up a strike among the transport workers there, and so, comrade——

PATCH Wait a minute, wait a minute Don't keep on calling me comrade

GASTER Why not?

PATCH Because I don't know you, and I'm not your comrade, see?

GASTER But we're both workers

PATCH (*sharply*) We're not I'm not a worker, for one. And you're not a worker, for another And he isn't, either

GASTER But you don't side with the boss class, don't help the capitalists, do you?

PATCH No, I don't Damn the capitalists

GASTER That's all right then You're on our side You're with the masses

PATCH No, I'm not Damn the masses too I don't know who the masses are, but to hell with them

GASTER We're the masses, you and I

PATCH You may be, but I'm not Masses my foot! What do you take me for? I'm not your comrade and I'm not one of the masses My name's Patch, and I'm second officer of this ship—or I was, when it *was* a ship and not a sort of roadhouse

GASTER (*eagerly*) Yes, and why is it lying idle like this? Because the capitalist system is breaking up——

PATCH Tell him I know And don't stay too long because we're very busy here this morning

Goes off GASTER *turns to* FLEATHERINGTON, *who smiles at him*

GASTER Good morning, comrade You don't look like a sailor

FLEATHERINGTON I'm not, I'm a research chemist

GASTER Not a member of the party?

FLEATHERINGTON Not a member of any party Haven't time for parties

GASTER All workers with hand or brain should be with us

He has strolled over to the place where the detonators are

FLEATHERINGTON (*sharply*) Don't touch those Detonators

GASTER (*withdrawing*) Oh! What are they doing here?

FLEATHERINGTON I brought them I'm trying out my new explosive, Fletherite It's here in this bag

GASTER (*significantly*) Oh—I see I used to know a little about chemistry myself—before I gave up everything for party work

FLEATHERINGTON (*eagerly, approaching him*) You did, eh? Well, this will amuse you I had been working for some time on nitro compounds Synthetic production from benzene——

Here they are interrupted by URSULA, who is very much the bored young female, anxious to attract the attention of males, any males

URSULA I say

They look at her without interest

Hello, here's somebody else Good morning

GASTER (*not interested*) Good morning (*To FLEATHERINGTON*) You were saying?

URSULA Rather exciting about the girl, isn't it? I saw her peeping round a corner and chased her a bit, but had to give it up Empty

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

ship's a marvellous place for hide-and-seek Awfully good for a party, too What I'm going to ask her is, what the particularly dirty work was that Sir Eric was up to? She must be in the know, eh?

FLEATHERINGTON (*indifferently*) Yes (*To GASTER, as they begin moving off together, to back right*) So I went through the usual ammonium nitrate treatments—the old stuff, you know—nothing new there And then a funny thing happened I'd sealed a small mixture in a test-tube—ordinary routine——

By this time they are off URSULA *stares after them in disgust*

URSULA (*staring after them*) Damned rude!

She lights a cigarette petulantly, and stares about her She pushes a chair, kicks something, then finds the packet of detonators She looks at it casually, throws it a little way in the air and catches it, thinking about something else PATCH *hurries in*

PATCH Where the devil is everybody? (*He sees what she has got Alarmed*) Don't! Stop it!

URSULA (*petulantly*) What are you talking about? If you don't stop running round and shouting and being rude, I'll throw this at you

PATCH Oh!—for the love of Pete—put 'em down

URSULA (*preening herself and approaching him*) Don't you think—I'm rather attractive?

PATCH No

URSULA What?

PATCH Yes

URSULA *Much* prettier than that nursemaid you've got along there Aren't I?

PATCH Yes, anything you like Only——

URSULA That's better You're all so rude and inattentive here Where shall I chuck this?

PATCH (*urgently*) Don't chuck it anywhere

LORD COTTINGLEY and GRIDLEY *hurriedly enter from entrance to cabins*

LORD COTTINGLEY Now listen to me, Ursula—and throw that thing away——

GRIDLEY and PATCH (*urgently*) No, don't!

LORD COTTINGLEY (*gasping*) No, don't For God's sake, child, put 'em down, but put 'em down carefully

GRIDLEY They're detonators

URSULA Well, will they break or something?

GRIDLEY (*mopping his brow*) They'll explode, blow your hands and legs off

URSULA (*alarmed now*) Oh!

Very carefully now, watched by the men, in a dead silence, she puts the package back where she found it LORD COTTINGLEY *breathes an audible sigh of relief* GRIDLEY and PATCH *whistle*

URSULA (*indignantly*) You might have told me!

GRIDLEY Now wait a minute Before we do anything else, let's get this settled Now don't move, anybody (*He slips into cabin entrance*)

URSULA Well, that's that The next thing to do is to find that girl and get the truth out of her

PATCH Never mind about her

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smoothly, but with menace*) But as law-abiding citizens, it may be our duty to notify the police that she's here

PATCH Don't talk rot It's nothing to do with you

LORD COTTINGLEY And then there's that poor fellow you've locked in—what about him?

PATCH We'll attend to him, thank you

URSULA I'd love to take you down a few pegs You're so pleased with yourself

GRIDLEY *enters, carrying a large piece of cardboard, on which he has written in big letters in red ink or chalk* Danger! Don't Touch! *He puts this card in front of the detonators*

GRIDLEY (*as he does this, muttering and groaning*) Holy Moses! What a morning! Everybody going completely and utterly bloody well barmy No sense anywhere in anything Human nature! I wish I was a bull in a paddock Or a porpoise or a dolphin Even a sea-gull, a half-starved mewing rotten seagull (*When the placard is in position*) There now! That's better Isn't it—better?

LORD COTTINGLEY Much Very sensible thing to do

GRIDLEY That's what I think—very sensible

URSULA Anybody would imagine you'd just invented writing

GRIDLEY (*with delusive mildness*) You know, you're an agreeable-looking girl—very agreeable-looking I'd call you handsome Yes, distinctly handsome Good features, nice colouring, fine, well-built girl Expensively educated too, I'll be bound

LORD COTTINGLEY (*complacently*) You couldn't buy a better education Best finishing schools in Europe And when she came out, two years ago, she was considered the prettiest debutante of that season She was one of the *Tatler's* lovelies.

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

GRIDLEY (*still mildly*) I'm sure she was, I'm sure she was A beautiful, expensive, fashionable young lady—(*With sudden startling ferocity*) and for two pins I'd give her a belting she'd remember for the rest of her life

URSULA (*furiously*) Well, here's one pin

She walks across and gives him a hard slap on the face LORD COTTINGLEY *cries out in protest* PATCH *gives a sudden hoot of laughter* GRIDLEY *is mildly astonished* URSULA *regards them all with contempt as she walks a few steps away from GRIDLEY*

GRIDLEY (*briskly*) Well, we'd better get things straightened up now

PATCH Wait a minute, Sam Where's that Communist chap who was here?

GRIDLEY (*exasperated*) Communist? What Communist? There aren't any Communists here Don't be silly, Bob, don't be silly

PATCH I'm not being silly I tell you there was one here a few minutes ago

GRIDLEY Where are they all coming from? What do they think this is—a conference?

LORD COTTINGLEY (*interested*) A Communist, eh? How do you know he was?

PATCH Because he told me he'd come down to work for the party at the Longport election Something about a strike too He was a Communist all right And a professional at that A professional comrade

LORD COTTINGLEY Has he gone then?

URSULA No, there was a rather Bolshie-looking man here talking to Mr What's-his-name——

LORD COTTINGLEY (*interested*) Fletherington

URSULA Yes They went along there together, having a good heart-to-heart talk

PATCH What about?

URSULA Oh—nitrates and test-tubes and things

GRIDLEY *and PATCH exchange glances and whistles* LORD COTTINGLEY *looks at once pleased and thoughtful*

PATCH I'm going to find those two

URSULA I shall come with you

PATCH What for?

URSULA Just to annoy you

PATCH *moves off*, URSULA *is following him*

LORD COTTINGLEY Wait a minute, my dear I may want you to take a wire for me

GRIDLEY (*sharply*) Oh no, you don't

LORD COTTINGLEY Don't what?

GRIDLEY Send a wire

LORD COTTINGLEY My dear sir, I don't understand you

URSULA Settle it between you I'm going to annoy who-is-it—Patch (*She goes*)

LORD COTTINGLEY If I choose to ask my daughter to take a telegram for me to the nearest post office, surely it isn't necessary for me to obtain your permission?

GRIDLEY (*earnestly*) Listen to me, Lord Cottingley, there isn't going to be any funny business with this ship

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smoothly*) My dear fellow, you mustn't talk like that, really you mustn't You're not handling a gang of trimmers or greasers now

GRIDLEY No, and I wish I was It's what I ought to be doing

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smoothly*) No doubt For my part, I'm extremely sorry to see an officer of your experience—very valuable experience—on the shelf like this, and if there is anything I can do—as you may guess, I still have some influence in shipping circles—

GRIDLEY (*earnestly*) Why don't you buy this ship—?

LORD COTTINGLEY I may

GRIDLEY Yes, but buy her to run her I'll get you officers and crew to run her like clockwork from here to Valparaiso—chaps that are eating their hearts out, praying for a job And there's nothing wrong with her You've only got to spend a thousand or two on an overhaul A beautiful ship What do you say?

LORD COTTINGLEY (*shaking his head*) When I want an expensive hobby, I'll run a steam yacht, thank you, not a big cargo boat

GRIDLEY You couldn't make it pay?

LORD COTTINGLEY Not a chance, my dear fellow It would eat money You might just as well take all the money you can find and throw it into the middle of the Atlantic

GRIDLEY (*in despair*) Then—by God!—you might as well take a few thousand of us too and throw us into the middle of the Atlantic But—I don't believe it Look at her! (*Indicates the ship*)

LORD COTTINGLEY (*not looking*) Yes, look at her

GRIDLEY Yes, but you're not looking at her You never have looked at her properly Sitting in offices, adding up figures, holding meetings, passing the cigars, that's not running ships.

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

LORD COTTINGLEY It's the only way you can run them

GRIDLEY No, they're like women You've got to love 'em and live with 'em This ship's like a woman to me It's not so many figures in a book—assets and debits and Judas Iscariot knows what! That's why I'm warning you No funny business No buying her to-day and scuttling her to-morrow

LORD COTTINGLEY I don't know what you mean by *scuttling her* And in any event, Gridley, you're forgetting one thing The moment this ship becomes my property, you've no longer any right to be here, and I can order you ashore at once

GRIDLEY (*angrily*) And when you do that, I shall go to the nearest police station

LORD COTTINGLEY That's where I ought to be going now

GRIDLEY Why?

LORD COTTINGLEY Aren't you forgetting your niece, Miss Jackson, known, I think, as "the missing witness"? And this man you've locked in a cabin? What about them?

He smiles triumphantly GRIDLEY is in a fury of bewilderment and exasperation He stamps and mutters curses LORD COTTINGLEY continues smoothly

Now be sensible I don't want to make trouble for either the girl or you——

GRIDLEY I don't like the sound o' that I've noticed people never tell you they don't want to make trouble until they're ready to start making trouble

LORD COTTINGLEY I've never done policeman's work and I don't mean to begin now I believe in minding my own business

GRIDLEY (*muttering*) Yes, but I don't like your business

LORD COTTINGLEY And all I ask is that you don't interfere in matters that don't concern you——

GRIDLEY This ship does concern me

LORD COTTINGLEY But it won't if I buy it

GRIDLEY Don't call her it She's a *she* not an *it* And she's still the *Gloriana* to me whether you buy her or whether they sell her to the Japs to make bicycles out of And while she's here, there's going to be no funny work with her In fact, while your lordship's in this frame of mind, there'd better be no telegrams

LORD COTTINGLEY Gridley, you're forgetting yourself

GRIDLEY Well, that's something you'll never do

FLEATHERINGTON *enters from right back*

FLEATHERINGTON They're arguing about politics along there, so I left them I can't understand why people should be always wanting to argue about politics when there are so many more interesting things to discuss

LORD COTTINGLEY I agree with you absolutely, my dear sir

GRIDLEY (*looking at them with suspicion*) Too much agreement altogether about you two (*Gloomily to FLEATHERINGTON*) D'you know what I'd have done with you, if I'd had any sense?

FLEATHERINGTON (*brightly*) No, Mr Gridley?

GRIDLEY I'd have thrown you off this ship two minutes after you came aboard Well, I'll have that Communist off anyhow That'll be a start (*Goes off right back*)

LORD COTTINGLEY (*softly*) What sort of fellow is this Communist, Mr Fletherington?

FLEATHERINGTON Not a bad fellow at all, Lord Cottingley He knows some chemistry, but has rather foolishly allowed himself to be drawn into his political business Quite a fanatic

LORD COTTINGLEY (*comfortably*) Indeed! Did you tell him about your explosive?

FLEATHERINGTON I did, and he was extremely interested He saw the amusing side of it too

LORD COTTINGLEY Oh, what's that?

FLEATHERINGTON Didn't I tell you? It's very amusing (*Laughs*) You see, I'd been working for some time on nitro compounds Synthetic production from benzine Well, I'd been going through the usual ammonium nitrate treatments—

LORD COTTINGLEY (*determined to have no more of this*) Oh yes, yes, yes—I remember Very amusing Very, very amusing But tell me, Mr Fletherington, you say this Communist fellow was interested—

FLEATHERINGTON Extremely interested He's very anxious to try it on this ship

LORD COTTINGLEY (*amiably*) Is he now? You know, Mr Fletherington, you've an extraordinary capacity for arousing interest, even enthusiasm, for your scientific experiments

FLEATHERINGTON Well, his reasons, I'm afraid, are not entirely scientific, though he's genuinely interested in Fletherite He seems to think that the blowing up of the ship could be of some political significance—though I didn't quite gather how

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smoothly*) No doubt he feels that if his party did it, they could say it was a protest—and of course a very forcible

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protest—against the capitalist system, which allows these ships to remain idle—

FLEATHERINGTON That's it exactly Does it make sense to you?

LORD COTTINGLEY Oh yes Although I'm a capitalist myself—and must of course publicly associate myself with the maintenance of the system—I can't help feeling there's something to be said for his point of view

FLEATHERINGTON You ought to have a talk with him

LORD COTTINGLEY I shall certainly have a talk with him

Sound of loud voices—GASTER's and PATCH's arguing furiously off right back "I'll show you what I mean" "Just listen to me, will you" "Now wait a minute" GRIDLEY *can be joining in too*

But just now somebody else seems to be having a talk with him

Enter GASTER, PATCH and GRIDLEY all arguing at once URSULA *follows them in, looking very bored*

GASTER (*shouting them down*) You don't know what Marx said

PATCH No, I don't know and I don't care I think for myself, see?

GASTER I can tell you exactly what he said

PATCH (*humorously*) Why, have you got him with you?

GASTER (*simply*) Yes (*Produces volume of Marx's Capital from his pocket*)

GRIDLEY (*wonderingly*) By thunder!—he has too

PATCH It's his Bible

GASTER (*as he turns the pages*) You're right It's my Bible Ought to be yours too

GRIDLEY Give me Schopenhauer

GASTER (*still turning*) A poor bourgeois pessimist

PATCH (*chuckling*) That's good I must remember that

GRIDLEY (*indignantly*) Here, wait a minute—

GASTER (*topping him*) Now listen (*Reads*) "If, then, the owner of money is to transform his money into capital, he must find in the commodity market a free worker, free in a double sense The worker must be able to dispose of his labour power as his own commodity, and, on the other hand, he must have no other commodities for sale, must be 'free' from everything that is essential for the realisation of his labour power"

URSULA (*forcefully, while the others are digesting this*) Chrerrrr-istmas!

She goes and sits down, disgusted with them, and lights a cigarette

PATCH (*excitedly*) Now, wait a minute. Who's this worker?

GASTER I've told you Anybody who does not own the means of production, who is not a capitalist, who has to sell his labour

PATCH Well then, what about me?

GRIDLEY Never mind about you, Bob (*Triumphantly to GASTER*) What about a man who runs a Punch and Judy show? Is he a capitalist? Is he a worker?

GASTER (*contemptuously*) We're not talking about Punch and Judy shows

GRIDLEY But you said he explained everything—well, what about a man who runs a Punch and Judy show?

PATCH (*quickly*) No, Sam, you're off it, you're off it

GRIDLEY (*loudly*) Off what?

PATCH (*shouting*) Off the argument, off the point

GASTER (*shouting*) Of course he is

GRIDLEY (*shouting*) What point?

LORD COTTINGLEY (*loudly, taking a hand in this*) Yes, what exactly is the point?

URSULA (*topping them all*) There isn't one They don't know what they're talking about

PATCH (*dismissing her*) I know what I'm talking about

GRIDLEY (*almost angrily*) Well, don't I know what I'm talking about?

GASTER (*bellowing*) No None of you know I know because I've studied these things It's all here in Marx If you come here, I'll show you

GRIDLEY, PATCH and LORD COTTINGLEY gather round him

FLEATHERINGTON lingers on the stage URSULA sits where she is, bored with them

Now read Marx for yourself

As he says this, loudly, CAPTAIN MELLOCK appears, a sinister figure He is a trim, athletic-looking man in his late thirties, not bad-looking in a rather hard style He has a romantic scar on his face He wears no hat, a dark blue uniform shirt, with a tiny Union Jack on one side and a number of military ribbons on the other, and neat dark trousers, with pockets big enough for a revolver The whole effect is that of a Fascist uniform He stands looking at the group, and only URSULA sees him at first She brightens up at once

URSULA (*to the others*) Hoy! Look what's come

They look at MELLOCK surprised

MELLOCK (*harshly*) Marx! Huh! Marx!

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GASTER (*sharply*) What about him?

MELLOCK (*harshly*) What about you, you mean, you dirty Red
You're Gaster, aren't you? Moscow's present to Longport

GASTER And I suppose you're Mellock, who's been talking so big?

MELLOCK (*correcting him sharply*) Captain Mellock Yes Of the
New British Fascisti

GASTER (*sneering*) New British Fascisti! Boys playing at soldiers!

MELLOCK Don't make any mistake, Gaster We're not all boys,
we're not all playing at soldiers I'm not, for one And I don't simply
talk big I mean what I say

PATCH (*rudely*) Well, say it, General, and then clear off

MELLOCK Shut up! I'm not talking to you—yet Listen, Gaster,
I've been looking for you all morning

GASTER Well, you've found me

MELLOCK Found a whole nest of you Party headquarters, eh?

PATCH Can you stop being a dam' fool for just a minute——?

MELLOCK I've told you, shut up

GRIDLEY Bob!

PATCH Yes, Sam

GRIDLEY We've let too many of 'em come aboard already But
this is definitely one we can't have at any price

PATCH You're quite right, Sam The General's out

MELLOCK (*moving a step nearer*) I'll give you Red bastards a
lesson in manners soon

PATCH Come on, Sam

He and GRIDLEY make a sharp move forward At the same time

MELLOCK *steps back and whips out a revolver, with which he covers them*

MELLOCK (*very harshly*) Come on, the lot of you Hands up, and
move back Come on, come on, sharp to it And don't think I won't
shoot, because I will

*He looks as if he will They all move back, except URSULA, who
looks on, delightedly, and are so grouped now that GRIDLEY and*

PATCH are separated from the others and to the left

URSULA Marvellous! Am I in this too?

MELLOCK (*giving her a quick sharp look*) You will be if you don't
keep quiet

URSULA (*appreciatively*) I think you're too sweet

MELLOCK (*still covering them with his gun, but concentrating chiefly
on GRIDLEY and PATCH*) Now then—— (*Reflects*)

PATCH He's been too often to the pictures, that's his trouble

MELLOCK (*sharply, to GRIDLEY and PATCH*) You two—who think you're damned tough—who are you?

PATCH (*promptly*) Hitler

GRIDLEY Mussolini (*Goes on grumbling in muttering tone*) Completely and utterly barmy, everything!

PATCH *makes the beginning of a quick movement, but* MELLOCK, *who is very alert, threatens him instantly, and PATCH has to keep quiet*

LORD COTTINGLEY (*at his smoothest*) Captain Mellock, I think you'd better let me explain

MELLOCK (*giving him half an eye*) Who are you? Keep your hands up

LORD COTTINGLEY I'm Lord Cottingley

MELLOCK (*surprised*) Lord Cottingley! What are you doing here?

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smoothly*) I used to be a director of the company that owns this ship I can explain everything

MELLOCK Let me get rid of these two fellows, first, before there's any explaining (*Indicating GRIDLEY and PATCH*)

LORD COTTINGLEY (*comfortably*) Well, there's this hold Send 'em down there

GRIDLEY (*indignantly*) That's a fine idea! Hell's bells, what a morning!

MELLOCK (*harshly, menacing them*) Go on Down there

They have to go down into the hold, with the open hatch on the right PATCH gives LORD COTTINGLEY a very unpleasant look

PATCH (*to LORD COTTINGLEY*) I'll remember this—you dirty old twister

URSULA (*with jubilant sweetness*) Good-bye—dear Mr Patch!

PATCH (*furiously as he disappears*) Errt-cha!

LORD COTTINGLEY (*stepping forward eagerly*) I'll help you with the hatch cover

URSULA (*gleefully*) And so will I

The three of them, with MELLOCK still keeping an eye on the other two, pull down the section of the hatch cover, and fasten it FLEATHERINGTON steps forward to take his bag

MELLOCK (*sharply*) Heigh!

LORD COTTINGLEY That's all right, Captain Mellock Let him have it I'll explain in a minute These two won't give you any trouble.

MELLOCK I don't trust Gaster a yard.

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LORD COTTINGLEY No, no, you leave this to me You'll understand in a minute Here, Fletherington

He takes the bag over to FLEATHERINGTON, who has retreated back to where GASTER is standing He begins whispering to them
MELLOCK stays where he is, watching them URSULA looks at him

URSULA Cigarette, Captain Mellock? (*Offers him one*)

MELLOCK (*taking it*) Thanks (*Lights it quickly*)

URSULA By the way, I'm Lord Cottingley's daughter—Ursula

MELLOCK I see

URSULA. You know, I think you're rather marvellous

MELLOCK (*indifferently*) Yes?

URSULA What a lot of ribbons you have! Are they bogus?

MELLOCK Course they aren't! What do you take me for? I've been soldiering one place and another, twenty years—ever since I was seventeen

URSULA That makes you thirty-seven, doesn't it? A nice age, I think Young men are so feeble

She smiles at him but he takes no notice He is now staring at the detonator notice He indicates it now

MELLOCK What's all that about?

URSULA My dear, you mustn't bully *me* like that As a matter of fact, they're detonators, and as I nearly blew myself up with them not long ago, that notice is there

MELLOCK (*pleased*) Humph! Caught 'em at it Just what we wanted

URSULA You haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about

MELLOCK I have Don't worry

URSULA I'm not worrying about *that* (*Looks at him speculatively, then drops her voice*) Tell me You're not one of those men who've no use for women, are you?

MELLOCK (*laughs*) Me? No fear! I've had too much use for 'em All over the place—

URSULA All right, I don't want to know the rest

MELLOCK (*calling across*) Well?

LORD COTTINGLEY (*coming down a few steps*) If you'll allow these two gentlemen to finish their conversation elsewhere—they won't leave the ship—they can't, except that way—I'll explain everything—

MELLOCK All right

FLEATHERINGTON *carrying his bag, and GASTER move off left*
LORD COTTINGLEY *comes down*

LORD COTTINGLEY Well, you seem to be a very melodramatic young man

MELLOCK I'm not

LORD COTTINGLEY What! Flourishing revolvers! Hands up! All the rest of it!

MELLOCK That's not melodrama I meant what I said No pretence about it at all I don't carry this revolver about with me for fun, any more than a navvy carries a pick and shovel about with him for fun

URSULA (*with slight mockery*) He's a gun-man

MELLOCK A gun-man, if you like Only I prefer to call myself a soldier It's been my profession ever since I was a schoolboy I've soldiered in France, Russia, Palestine, China and South America

LORD COTTINGLEY Why? Stupid life!

MELLOCK I didn't mind it, and anyhow it was all I could do And—don't forget—it's you people who're pretending—not me You're pretending the world is still a nice safe place, and that the war stopped in 1918

LORD COTTINGLEY Well, didn't it?

MELLOCK You bet your life it didn't I ought to know I've been following it round ever since

LORD COTTINGLEY Oh—possibly—in a few out-of-the way places But here we've seen nothing of it

MELLOCK No, but you will—you will It'll come rolling back Otherwise, I shouldn't be here And don't imagine I'm here for fun I'm getting good pay and privileges, and I've been promised much better pay and privileges

URSULA Good!

LORD COTTINGLEY But what are you doing here?

MELLOCK The Reds have put up a candidate of their own for this by-election in Longport, where a lot of the scum round the docks are half Bolshie already I'm down there—sent by our own party—to keep an eye on these Reds, especially this fellow, Gaster That's why I followed him here in my car And you can bet I'm not leaving until I know exactly what's going on here So now *you* can do some explaining

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smiling*) Looks bad, doesn't it?

MELLOCK Well—I find you here hobnobbing with a notorious professional Red organiser—and with a lot of high explosive waiting to be used——

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smiling*) Terrible (*Is about to go on more con-*

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fidentially, when he remembers URSULA, and turns to her) Wouldn't you like to go for a walk, my dear?

URSULA (*very decidedly*) No

LORD COTTINGLEY You'll find all this talk very boring

URSULA Oh—no, I won't (*Smiles impudently at MELLOCK, who frowns at her*) I wouldn't miss a word

MELLOCK (*rather casually to LORD COTTINGLEY*) We could stick her away for half an hour or so

URSULA (*marches up to him, very erect, defiant, feminine*) You try sticking me away somewhere! Just try it Now!

LORD COTTINGLEY (*to MELLOCK*) Don't encourage her

MELLOCK (*indignantly*) I'm not encouraging her Catch me encouraging such a kid!

URSULA (*with passionate irony*) Kid! My God! You mean kiddie—don't you?

MELLOCK Anything you like, only shut up We want to talk

URSULA *looks at him in disgust, goes and sits down, where she watches them as they talk*

LORD COTTINGLEY (*confidentially*) Captain Mellock I'm as much anti-communist as you are In fact, I'm on your side entirely Join your party, if you like But this is the position Here's a ship Now supposing this ship was completely destroyed—blown up—by the local Communists?

MELLOCK Now that's just the sort of thing we want to catch 'em doing

LORD COTTINGLEY (*easily*) Of course it is Burning the Reichstag and so forth Always has a wonderful effect on the minds of the decent law-abiding public

MELLOCK After a few acts of terrorism of that sort, the public will ask for us to protect 'em That's the strength of our position

LORD COTTINGLEY Of course it is

MELLOCK The trouble is—the poor swine here haven't the guts to be terrorists

LORD COTTINGLEY (*softly*) That's a nuisance, of course But—you see—here's a nice big ship, and here's some powerful new high explosive and the man who knows how it ought to be handled, and here's your friend Gaster And then you come charging in—just at the wrong moment (*They look meaningly at one another*)

MELLOCK I see

LORD COTTINGLEY (*softly*) I thought you would

MELLOCK But where do I come in?

LORD COTTINGLEY Obviously you don't yet You go out Though, between ourselves, I'm glad you came when you did, because we were able to get rid of those two ship's officers——

MELLOCK Oh—those blighters we shoved in the hold?

LORD COTTINGLEY Yes They looked like being a nuisance, and now they're well out of the way, until we've made all our plans Now about you Wait a minute (*He thinks, then looks reflectively at watch*) You must give me an hour or so to settle things here Lunch-time too (*Turns to* URSULA) Ursula, would you like to take Captain MELLOCK off in search of some food and drink for us here?

URSULA Yes Good idea

LORD COTTINGLEY You could go in our car or his Bring some decent sandwiches and some whisky, enough for four or five of us

Goes back to right and looks down deck for FLEATHERINGTON *and*

GASTER *Gives whistle and beckons to them Then turns to* URSULA *and* MELLOCK

When you come back, Captain Mellock had better wait down there until you come up here and see me (*To* MELLOCK) Safer, I think

MELLOCK Sounds a good scheme

URSULA (*moving*) Come on Let's go

MELLOCK (*as he prepares to go*) What about—— (*Points to hatch*)

LORD COTTINGLEY (*casually*) Oh—those fellows They can stay where they are And anyhow, they can't make trouble I know something that will keep them quiet

URSULA (*to* MELLOCK) Yes I'll tell you about that as we go along Serve 'em right too Foul pair, I thought Come on, let's go shopping

She and MELLOCK *go off* LORD COTTINGLEY *looks down off right again and nods Then comes forward and arranges three chairs together, GASTER and* FLEATHERINGTON *enter from back right* FLEATHERINGTON *is still carrying his bag*

GASTER Has that Fascist bully gone?

LORD COTTINGLEY (*smoothly*) Yes—he's gone He only needed a little talking to And I've sent my daughter off to find us something to eat and drink

FLEATHERINGTON That's an excellent idea I knew there was something wrong, but couldn't think what it was I must be hungry I was in such a hurry to get out of the house this morning to test the Fletherite that I had no breakfast—only a cup of tea.

LORD COTTINGLEY (*the hearty chairman now*) Not enough The inner man Eh, Mr Gaster? Ha ha ha ha! Well, we'll put that right

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And now this is our opportunity to have a little talk Sit here, Mr Fletherington, won't you? (*Indicates chair right*) And perhaps you would like to sit here, Mr Gaster (*Indicates chair left*)

They both sit He takes the chair in the middle with some ceremony

Excellent! Capital! Well now—to business—

GASTER Wait a minute, what about those two sailors?

FLETERINGTON Oh yes, I'd forgotten them

LORD COTTINGLEY That's all right They're safe—though perhaps not very comfortable—in number three hold We needn't worry about them for some time

GASTER Well, I shan't Obvious counter-revolutionary types, both of them

LORD COTTINGLEY (*the smooth chairman*) Quite so And very acute of you, Mr Gaster, to notice the fact so quickly Well now, I gather that both of you—for different reasons—one scientific, the other political—have a certain interest in blowing up this ship All right Now there are certain questions that must be carefully considered I might make a little agenda, eh? (*He produces a piece of paper and pencil and makes a few rapid notes*)

GASTER (*solemnly*) I always like to have an agenda

LORD COTTINGLEY Very sensible of you Now then The first problem is undoubtedly that of time Exactly when, gentlemen—exactly when shall the ship be blown up?

He looks from one to the other with a smiling alertness They are looking thoughtful The curtain comes down

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE *Same as before An hour and a half later* LORD COTTINGLEY, FLEATHERINGTON and GASTER are still sitting in the same chairs, but now they look hot and flustered, as if they have been arguing a long time When the Curtain first discovers them, they are having a breathing space, as if they have just reached a deadlock and were giving themselves time to recover their breath LORD COTTINGLEY mops his brow They all start to speak, then decide to say nothing and collapse into their chairs again Then they all speak together

LORD COTTINGLEY To-morrow night is the earliest possible moment, I tell you, and I would prefer the day after——

GASTER (*at the same time*) From the point of view of the party, the sooner the better, and I say—to-night while we are certain of everything——

FLEATHERINGTON (*at the same time*) I must repeat the opinion I have expressed throughout, that unless it is done as soon as possible, I cannot guarantee anything——

They all stop and look at one another, rather exhausted LORD COTTINGLEY holds up his hand for silence, and looks at his watch

LORD COTTINGLEY Gentlemen, we've been arguing this point for over an hour We really must get on

GASTER We have here, of course, comrades, three fundamentally different types of mind Any Marxist thinker would recognise that, firstly——

LORD COTTINGLEY (*checking him*) Mr Gaster—comrade—do you realise that if we let you go on with this, it would make the fifth lecture on Marxist philosophy you've given us during this last hour? It's too much, y'know

FLEATHERINGTON Much too much Now may I give you the reason why I do not want any delay? I've told you many times that I don't want one——

LORD COTTINGLEY (*wearily*) Many, many, many times, Mr Fletherington

FLEATHERINGTON Quite so, but so far I haven't told you why (*Confidentially*) It's because I'm afraid my wife would get to know—and stop it

GASTER But surely, comrade—you, a scientist, an intellectual—are not afraid of your wife?

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FLEATHERINGTON (*simply*) I am

LORD COTTINGLEY (*to GASTER*) I take it that you aren't married?

GASTER No, I'm not

LORD COTTINGLEY Obviously You know, the amount you have to learn about everything—just the most ordinary everyday things—seems to me to have reached staggering proportions, and I see it growing every few seconds

FLEATHERINGTON My wife—

LORD COTTINGLEY (*stopping him*) You must tell us all about Mrs Fletherington afterwards, Mr Fletherington Just now we really must keep to the point

FLEATHERINGTON But she *is* the point Don't you see—

GASTER (*sharply*) No, I don't see And we are wasting valuable time Don't you agree? (*To LORD COTTINGLEY*)

LORD COTTINGLEY Yes, I do agree

FLEATHERINGTON (*eagerly*) Oh—I agree too, for that matter Oh—most certainly

GASTER (*to LORD COTTINGLEY*) To-morrow night is for you the earliest time to blow up the ship, eh?

LORD COTTINGLEY Yes, and I'd prefer the day after to-morrow

GASTER To-morrow night is for me the latest time For him too, no doubt

FLEATHERINGTON All I wish to say is this— (*Goes towards detonator placard*)

LORD COTTINGLEY (*irritably*) What are you doing?

FLEATHERINGTON I might as well have these detonators (*Takes them and puts them in his bag, which he is still holding, then comes back*)

LORD COTTINGLEY Then we have here the basis of a compromise—

GASTER Correct It would not be too late for us On the other hand, it would give you time to order these two men off the ship—

LORD COTTINGLEY Oh yes—but they're not the difficulty That part of it's easy We can ignore them

As he says this, PATCH suddenly drops down on deck from some convenient part of the superstructure He is extremely dirty and dishevelled and his clothes are torn, as if he had been crawling and climbing for the last hour He has a stout iron bar with him, and is a very angry and formidable figure

PATCH (*very menacingly*) Don't move, any of you The first man who moves, I'll flatten him with this

FLEATHERINGTON (*mildly*) But—Mr Patch—

PATCH (*menacingly*) Don't talk either I've been crawling and climbing for nearly an hour like a ruddy cockroach through the foulest holes in this ship, and I'm ready to kill somebody So keep still and shut up, before I flatten you to the deck

They are paralysed He hastily goes round to the hatch, and dexterously and quickly unfastens the cover

PATCH (*as he removes the cover*) All right, Sam

GRIDLEY climbs out, very hot and dirty, in a furious rage, also holding a thick iron rod He is a terrifying figure At the sight of the three standing there, he gives a great roar of inarticulate rage

GRIDLEY (*roaring*) Wa-a-ah! You bloody toads! You poxed-up rats! You red-eyed stinking weasels! I'll break you to pieces I'll tear the lights and livers out of you (*Steps forward As they make a noisy but inarticulate protest*) I don't care who did it, you're all in it, every flaming man Jack of you

PATCH If they hadn't been, they'd have let us out before now Crawling and climbing like a God-dam' cockroach, I've been!

GRIDLEY Trying to shut us up in our own ship! Round there, Bob, they're not leaving us yet

LORD COTTINGLEY (*to PATCH, who has cut off the retreat of the party to the shore*) But wait a minute, you can't do this

PATCH (*through his teeth, menacingly, going up to him*) Who suggested putting us in the hold, eh? You'd be surprised what I could do to you—now!

FLEATHERINGTON But—Mr Gridley—

GRIDLEY (*with passion*) You started this, by Judas (*He goes and opens door of small store room, far side of entrance to cabins*) Get in there

FLEATHERINGTON But—but—

GRIDLEY (*in a violent storm, threatening him with the iron rod*) Hell's million bells! D'you want me to knock the living daylight out 'of you? In there!

FLEATHERINGTON, terrified, goes in GRIDLEY immediately steps across and locks the door

PATCH Cabins B and C for these two, eh?

GRIDLEY Yes Rush 'em up the alleyway, boy, rush 'em up

He pounces on GASTER and rushes him out, while PATCH, delighted, seizes LORD COTTINGLEY behind and rushes him after

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There is a great noise off, protesting and roaring, locking of doors Then silence GRIDLEY and PATCH return, panting and rubbing their hands

GRIDLEY I don't know where that gets us—but now I feel a bit better—(*muttering*) the sons of— (*Blows his breath out*)

PATCH (*pugnaciously*) Yes, but where's the fellow with the blue shirt and the gun? That's the fellow I want to take a crack at And when I see him, I'm going to chance it—rush him—gun or no gun—

GRIDLEY (*sitting down heavily*) What a day! What a day! I've not had such a day since that time when the trimmers pinched that cask o' brandy at Durban That was a day

PATCH Before my time

GRIDLEY Dare say it was But—bless me!—There was more sense even in that than in this I mean to say, you knew where you were, Bob, you knew where you were You knew what trimmers were You knew what brandy was You'd only to add 'em together They were all fighting drunk, that's all But this—it's loony from start to finish—

PATCH Clean batty!

GRIDLEY (*in short despairing phrasing*) Blowing trees up! Reds—and blues—and revolvers—and—and—detonators—blowing ships up! Oh! (*Despairs of it*)

PATCH (*after a pause*) Sam, we've got to work this out, and do it quick

GRIDLEY I know I know

PATCH It's not only the ship Don't forget—there's Hilda

GRIDLEY Hilda? What Hilda?

PATCH Your niece, Hilda Jackson, you old fathead

GRIDLEY (*wearily*) Oh!—crumpets—I'd forgotten about her (*Remembering*) Why—then—there's—

PATCH Slivers Of course there is He's still where I put him—in Cabin A (*Takes out key, then puts it back*)

GRIDLEY (*muttering*) Slivers That's right Cabin A Hilda Then— (*Mops himself, then adds solemnly*) You know, Bob, this wants thinking out

PATCH (*irritably*) Don't tell me That's what I'm telling you

GRIDLEY (*reproachfully*) It doesn't matter, boy, which of us is telling which That's a detail The great point is—we've got to think it out

PATCH (*his voice rising in a frenzy of irritation*) I know we have I know we have Don't keep telling me

He paces about GRIDLEY gives him a bewildered glance, then tries hard to concentrate, beginning to reckon, quite solemnly, on his fingers PATCH suddenly stops

PATCH Sam!

GRIDLEY (*eagerly*) Have you got it, Bob? Have you settled it?

PATCH No I was going to say "Are you hungry?"

GRIDLEY (*impatiently*) Course I am It's a long way past dinner-time We'll just have to wait, though (*He takes out a pipe, and sucks it without lighting it*)

PATCH *paces restlessly*

PATCH (*stopping*) Know what I'd like to do?

GRIDLEY No

PATCH Throw 'em ashore, the whole flaming lot of 'em Just open those cabin doors—one, two, three, four—bang, boosh, bish, bash!—out!

GRIDLEY (*fired*) All right, boy, let's do it, let's do it

PATCH How can we, you old chump, when the first thing they'll do when they get ashore is to tell the police about Hilda?

GRIDLEY (*disappointed*) Ah—yes, of course

PATCH Cottingley'd do it like a shot He's the fellow I've got it in for—the old twister I'd like to drop him among those trees, like a dam' great acorn

GRIDLEY Yes, and the next minute he's off to the post office to wire his agent to buy this ship—

PATCH Which means that we're going out and the ship's going up.

GRIDLEY And we're not going out and the ship's not going up, or anyhow whether we go out or not, the ship's not going up

PATCH Fletherite there— (*pointing to door*) started it all If he was out o' the way, it'd be simpler He'd better be the first we get rid of—

GRIDLEY (*mopping himself*) Just a minute Just a minute This wants working out properly What we want here is system, and that's your trouble, Bob, you haven't got system You want to rush at it like a bull at a fence You were just the same with Schopenhauer—

PATCH (*irritably*) Oh—for God's sake—don't start on him now—

GRIDLEY *stares at him with the air of one giving a silent but terrible rebuke PATCH catches it, and softens at once*

I'm sorry, Sam

GRIDLEY That's all right, boy You're worried I'm worried

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We're both worried We don't know where we are Now wait——
(*Begins thinking and reckoning on fingers again*) Here!

PATCH (*expecting a solution*) Yes?

GRIDLEY What became of old Batten, who used to be chief in the *Moriana*?

PATCH (*impatiently*) I don't know What's he got to do with it?

GRIDLEY (*blankly*) Nothing, so far as I know But he came into my mind just then—old Batten of the *Moriana*——

PATCH Well, put him out of your mind We've got to think

GRIDLEY Paper and pencil might help There's so many of 'em

Is about to meditate again, when they both hear sound of cautious approaching steps from off back right They look at one another, GRIDLEY rises quietly They both quietly turn in direction of sound and make one or two quiet movements in that direction Finally, HILDA'S head appears cautiously round corner back right Seemg only them she comes in and forward She has made some change—but not an elaborate one—in her dress since Act One

HILDA (*quietly*) Hello! Only you two?

PATCH Only us

HILDA (*more confident tone now*) Do you know, I was so tired, I fell asleep

PATCH (*sympathetically*) I'm not surprised Are you, Sam?

GRIDLEY Yes

HILDA (*to PATCH*) Oh—but what a mess you're in!

PATCH (*grinning*) What a mess we're all in!

HILDA (*penitently*) And it's all my fault, isn't it? I mean, that man—the one you locked in the cabin——

GRIDLEY (*hesitating*) Well, yes—there's him But—er—as a matter of fact, he's not the only one (*She stares at him*) No We've got—er—three other chaps—er—locked in cabins

To his astonishment, HILDA begins giggling softly, and sits down and stuffs a handkerchief in her mouth PATCH grins in sympathy, but GRIDLEY regards her with annoyance He brings PATCH away from her, well downstage

GRIDLEY Now there's the thing I was telling you about the other afternoon——

PATCH What?

GRIDLEY About women. You see, you never know how they're going to take anything Always contrary, see? If I'd said to her "Oh yes—ha ha ha—you'll laugh when I tell you—we've got three other

chaps locked up here"—she'd have started crying and told me I ought to be ashamed of myself And look at her now

PATCH Well, what of it? She's taking it the right way

HILDA (*getting up*) I'm sorry, uncle But it sounded so silly

PATCH If you'll excuse me, I'll get myself cleaned up a bit

HILDA (*rather flirtatiously, for her*) Oh, we'll excuse you for that

PATCH Thought you would! (*To GRIDLEY*) Shan't be two minutes (*Goes through doorway to cabins*)

GRIDLEY (*grumbling*) What's he want to go cleaning himself up for now?

HILDA Because he knows he'd look nicer He's rather good-looking, you know

GRIDLEY (*grumpily*) I didn't know

HILDA (*with a faint shade of tartness*) Well, I hope you know about that policeman

GRIDLEY (*aghast*) What policeman?

HILDA Down there in the wood I peeped over the side and saw him He was poking about near those damaged trees—where the explosion was—for about five minutes, then he looked as if he was coming here—and then he stopped

GRIDLEY What for?

HILDA (*amused*) Well—he seemed to be looking at his nose In a little hand mirror He was looking at his nose in it It seemed such a silly thing for a policeman to be doing—

GRIDLEY (*with the gloomy detached air of a man who sees the whole world steadily going mad and out of control*) Yesterday I'd have agreed with you This morning—early—I'd have agreed with you Now—well—I'm not surprised, that's all Just not surprised If he took his nose off and threw it on the deck here, I wouldn't be very surprised It's all—well—that's how it's getting (*Suddenly shouting*) Completely and utterly barmy!

HILDA (*alarmed*) Sh-sh He might hear you See if he's still there

GRIDLEY *goes to the back and cautiously looks down right over the side Then he returns*

GRIDLEY That's Sergeant Wilks He's stopped looking at his nose now, he's looking at the trees again

HILDA (*alarmed*) Do you think he's coming here for me?

GRIDLEY I dunno Don't suppose he knows why he's here Now if we'd been wanting a bit o' company, somebody fresh to talk to, and everything here'd been straight and above-board, that sergeant

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wouldn't have been round in a week But to-day, of course, he must come poking round It's my belief something somewhere (*points up, then down to suggest supernatural power*) fixes up these things They overhear you grumbling because it's quiet, and they say "We'll fix these chaps in a proper tangle We'll show 'em something" That's my belief He's (*indicating back, i e., police sergeant*) part of it They just put it into his head to come here and tangle us up a bit more

HILDA (*reproachfully*) Oh—uncle—you sound so hopeless

GRIDLEY Me! You never made a bigger mistake in your life What, after thirty-five years in ships' engine-rooms! I've had packets like this before, girl They won't tangle me—by thunder!

PATCH *returns, looking much cleaner and neater now*

PATCH Well, I feel better for that

GRIDLEY That's good, because you're going to need it Do you know who's just down there—poking round? Sergeant Wilks

PATCH *begins whistling softly*

HILDA (*to PATCH*) I think he may be looking for me

PATCH He may You'd better go below again No—up on the bridge, that's the best Then you can keep a look out on the path, and when you see him going, you can come out——

HILDA All right (*Turns to go*)

GRIDLEY (*seriously*) And—Hilda——

HILDA (*turning*) Yes?

GRIDLEY Just be thinking of something tasty you can make with corned beef, flour and mixed pickles——

PATCH (*solicitously crossing to her*) You'll be all right Don't worry

She goes PATCH and GRIDLEY look at one another, then whistling softly, go together to the back and cautiously peep over the side They instantly jump back—as if the sergeant was nearer than they expected—nod at one another—then return slowly, whistling softly again, holding themselves rather stiffly, like men who expect to get a blow in the back They sit down carefully, light pipe and cigarette, and obviously begin making conversation for the sergeant's benefit They have a droll false air

GRIDLEY Yes, Bob

PATCH What, Sam?

GRIDLEY I was thinking about corned beef We had a cook once—before your time, Bob—it was in the old *Floriana*—who could do anything with corned beef He'd have made you a Christmas pudding

out of it Marvel he was—with corned beef A Sunderland man
He'd a gammy leg

PATCH (*keeping it going*) What's that got to do with it?

GRIDLEY What's what got to do with it?

PATCH Gammy leg

GRIDLEY Well—after all—a gammy leg, y'know How would you
like to have a gammy leg?

*The SERGEANT has now appeared and is slowly coming forward,
a large slow man, with a very sunburnt nose They pretend not
to notice him*

I mean to say, it wasn't in his favour, was it? All the more credit to
him—I say—

*The SERGEANT has now sat down, between them but a little back,
and is taking off his helmet, then mopping his brow He touches
his nose tenderly*

SERGEANT WILKS (*slowly*) Good afternoon

PATCH Hello—Sergeant

GRIDLEY Good afternoon, Sergeant Wilks

SERGEANT WILKS Warm again Very warm

GRIDLEY (*gravely*) You ought to have something on that nose,
Sergeant Have we got anything he could put on it, Bob?

PATCH No we haven't, Sam Nothing at all

SERGEANT WILKS I've got some stuff at home, thank you My
wife's uncle suffers the same way—and he sent it Terrible lot o'
bother this by-election's making in Longport I hear they had to
take several of 'em in last night Disorderly conduct

GRIDLEY (*solemnly*) You hear that, Bob?

PATCH Yes, Sam

GRIDLEY (*to SERGEANT*) He sometimes thinks he'd like to be down
at Longport, but I tell him he's better off here, nice and quiet

SERGEANT WILKS That is so, that is so You're all right Very
nice and quiet—peaceful—

*At these fateful words, GRIDLEY and PATCH cringe a little and
wait for something dreadful to happen, but it doesn't—to their
relief They whistle softly Then they look at the SERGEANT, who
is staring hard at the detonator placard The SERGEANT looks
slowly from the placard to them They look at him, at the placard,
and back at him*

PATCH (*explaining it*) One of his (*indicating GRIDLEY*) little jokes
Not funny I think

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SERGEANT WILKS (*very heavily*) Oh—well, we all like a bit o' fun sometimes

PATCH and GRIDLEY (*together Fatuously*) Yes That's right

SERGEANT WILKS Village to-day seems to be full o' wives looking for their husbands

GRIDLEY and PATCH *do not like the sound of this*

PATCH Oh!

SERGEANT WILKS Yes Lady came dashing up to me—a visitor, not a local—and said she was looking for her husband—little chap in a brown suit—spectacles—might be carrying a little black bag Feather-something I think the name was The way she carried on you'd have thought that instead of just giving her the slip for a bit o' fishing or something, he was going to blow the place up—

GRIDLEY Ah!

SERGEANT WILKS Then there's Mrs Slivers, which reminds me Has Mr Slivers been here to-day?

GRIDLEY and PATCH *look at one another slowly*

GRIDLEY Has he, Bob?

PATCH I'm just trying to think, Sam (*To SERGEANT*) Why?

SERGEANT WILKS His wife's in a bit of fluster about him Spoke to me about an hour since He set off this morning—to deliver one or two orders for the shop—and hasn't come back yet His wife can't understand it, never known him miss his dinner before And *she* said he said he was coming here (*Stares at them*)

PATCH (*slowly*) That's right, he *was* here this morning You remember, Sam?

GRIDLEY I do now, Bob Yes, Mr Slivers was here fairly early this morning

PATCH Where did he say he was going to after he left us?

GRIDLEY Can't remember, can't remember (*Specially to SERGEANT*) Can't remember

SERGEANT WILKS I see

He walks slowly to back GRIDLEY and PATCH stand watching him, very carefully SERGEANT looks over the side, down right

SERGEANT WILKS Somebody seems to have been up to something along there, don't they? Trees smashed Branches all over the place Somebody's been up to something

PATCH Isn't that just what I said to you, Sam? Somebody—I said—has been up to something there

GRIDLEY You did And I remember you took the very words out of my mouth

SERGEANT WILKS (*staring steadily at them*) Mmmmm!

GRIDLEY (*cheerfully*) Yes, right out of my mouth Well, good afternoon, Sergeant

PATCH (*cheerfully*) Good afternoon, Sergeant And look after that nose

GRIDLEY (*vaguely*) And—any time y'know——

PATCH Yes—any time——

SERGEANT WILKS (*slowly, still staring*) Mmmmm! Good afternoon!

They watch him go When he has gone PATCH makes a loud tut-tut-ing noise They come downstage

PATCH (*tut-tut-tut-ing*) What does he call himself? What a sergeant!

GRIDLEY (*indignantly*) You heard him? (*Imitating*) Mmmm! Mmmmm! That's what we pay 'em for

PATCH And pensions!

GRIDLEY And what good is he?

PATCH Useless Here's a fellow comes and blows up half the wood down there, and all this sergeant can say is (*imitating*) "Somebody must have been up to something" (*Snorts*)

GRIDLEY And this poor Mrs Slivers She's worrying about her husband He's not come back He's missed his dinner

PATCH She's quite right to worry

GRIDLEY Of course she is But what does he do? Comes round here and tells us she's in a bit of a fluster, never looks for Slivers, and goes away Mmmmm! Mmmmm! And where does that get him? It isn't asking questions It isn't even good manners

PATCH It's nothing If he d have had this ship to look after to-day, it would have been in bits all over the countryside now

GRIDLEY That's right If he was in the fix we're in now, he wouldn't know where to start

PATCH (*rather dubiously*) No

GRIDLEY (*dubiously*) No

PATCH Well, where do we start? Because it's time we got started

GRIDLEY There you go Charging at it again

PATCH I want to be doing something I like action

GRIDLEY I know, and there's a lot o' people about like you They all want to be doing something Action Only they don't stop to think what it is they want to do, and what action it ought to be So you get 'em chasing old Jews down side-streets, chucking bombs into machines they can't mend, pulling down——

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PATCH All right, Sam, all right Only don't forget, I've been very useful so far—if it hadn't been for me, you'd have still been down that hold——

GRIDLEY Well, it's not my fault if I weigh fifteen stone instead of eleven, is it?

PATCH (*grinning*) Yes, you should eat less

GRIDLEY (*indignantly*) Me! I don't eat half as much as you——

PATCH Keep to the point, Sam I say I've been very useful so far, and I'll be useful to the finish It's all very well saying we must stop and think, but you haven't done any thinking yet All you've done is—stop

HILDA *appears, rather shyly and cautiously*

HILDA What happened? Did he say anything about me?

PATCH No, he didn't Not a word You're all right

HILDA (*rather disappointed*) Oh! He might have said *something*

GRIDLEY (*with heavy irony*) Shall we call him back and tell him who you are?

HILDA Don't be silly, Uncle

GRIDLEY Well, don't you begin talking like your mother

HILDA (*to PATCH*) Tell me about all these men

PATCH (*quickly*) Slivers is in Cabin A Lord Cottingley—an old twister who'd like to see this ship blown up—is in B There's a Communist, also on the blow up, in C And there (*pointing to door*) is your friend Fletherington, the blower-up-in-chief

HILDA Can't you tell them you'll let them all out if they promise to say nothing about me? Then make them all go?

GRIDLEY Oh—it's not so simple as that In fact, it's complicated, y'know—by thunder!—it's complicated——

HILDA (*trying to be reassuring*) Perhaps it isn't—really

GRIDLEY (*shouting*) But it is, girl, it is Don't tell me it isn't I *know* I tell you, it's hellishly complicated (*Mops himself and blows*)

HILDA All right, Uncle, don't shout at me Keep cool You'll never be able to think if you don't Now take them one at a time——

PATCH (*admiringly*) That's the style

GRIDLEY Who's saying it isn't? Order, method, everything in its place, a time for everything—haven't I been advocating them things for thirty years in these ships, ever since——

PATCH (*saying it with him*) The *Theodosia* went down All right, Sam, we know Go on, Miss Jackson——

HILDA (*smiling*) You might as well call me Hilda, you know

PATCH Good! Hilda then

GRIDLEY (*impatiently*) What does it matter what he calls you? We'll be calling you Convict Ninety-nine, if we don't get on

HILDA (*sharply, reproachfully*) Uncle—that's not funny—it's beastly

PATCH Quite right, Hilda I'm surprised at you, Sam Talking like that to her!

GRIDLEY (*charmingly*) My dear, if I've hurt your feelings—I'm sorry I'm a rough old devil, y'know—been knocking round in rough company for over forty years—and I'm nearly at my wits' end—you understand, don't you? (*Gives her a little hug They are all reconciled*)

HILDA Well now, taking them one at a time I should get Mr Fletherington out of the way first He doesn't really mean any harm, I'm sure He's a nice little man

GRIDLEY He may be—but he's practically barmy——

PATCH (*eagerly*) Hilda's right, Sam We've got Fletherington taped We can tell him his wife's looking for him, and we can also tell him that Sergeant Wilks is asking who did the damage down there

GRIDLEY (*enthusiastically*) That's the idea, Bob We're getting somewhere now, making a start, anyhow

PATCH And he wouldn't give Hilda here away, because he liked her—you remember

HILDA (*eagerly*) Not only that but—— I've been thinking I'm giving you most of the trouble—really If I went, it would be much easier Now, isn't Mr Fletherington staying with his wife at a farm round here? It's probably quite out of the way If he thought it would be all right—I might go with him He's nice, and his wife sounded nice——

GRIDLEY That's it Bob——

PATCH (*triumphantly*) We've got it The rest'll be easy

GRIDLEY Ah—but wait a minute There's Cottingley As soon as we let him go—*phht!*—a telegram to London, and he's bought the ship

PATCH Yes, but don't you see if Fletherington's gone with his explosive, and if we've got rid of this Communist—he'll think twice about it? He only got the idea because everything was on the spot, with two mugs ready to do his dirty work for him And he's nothing on us, because Hilda'll have gone too There'll be only Shivers and he doesn't count

HILDA (*to GRIDLEY*) Don't you see?

GRIDLEY See it all Fletherington's the man We'll let him out

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PATCH *hurries to small door and opens it triumphantly*

PATCH All right, Mr Fletherington

No reply, nothing happens He looks inside

He's not there

GRIDLEY (*roaring*) What?

PATCH Not here (*Goes inside, obviously to investigate*)

GRIDLEY (*to HILDA, with the air of a man almost exasperated beyond speech*) Conjuring work now, see? The Great Houdini! Indian rope tricks! I thought we were being let off too easy You see, when it starts getting out of control, it goes on First, a bearing or two, then the valves are jammed, then the flywheel's cock-eyed, then the big shaft starts to buckle— Do you ever read Schopenhauer?

HILDA No

GRIDLEY It's all in there—though he'd never seen an engine

PATCH (*coming down*) He'd never seen anything If you're going to bring that old moth-eaten grouser into it, we'll get nowhere I saw how he got out Squeezed through the ventilator

GRIDLEY (*full of energy again*) It's ten to one he hasn't left the ship It's a nasty jump wherever he tries it

PATCH And another thing He hasn't got his detonators They're safe

GRIDLEY That's right They're here

Goes to detonator placard and pulls it aside

No Gone

PATCH and HILDA (*together*) Gone!

GRIDLEY (*grandly defiant now*) Yes, and let 'em go (*He sends the placard skimming off high right*) I don't care how, when and where they've gone For—by Moses and Jehosophat!—boy, they're not going to do it on us If we've got to eat 'em alive, we're going to save this ship

PATCH (*with enthusiasm*) That's the stuff Come on Fletherington must be somewhere about

Enter URSULA She is dusty, lumping and cross

URSULA (*unpleasantly surprised at the sight of them*) Oh!

PATCH (*aggressively*) Yes—oh! You hoped we were still down in the hold, didn't you?

URSULA Yes

PATCH (*glaring*) A nice girl you are!

GRIDLEY (*ogre-ishly*) Yes, we're very fond of you

URSULA Where is everybody?

HILDA (*calmly but promptly*) They've gone

URSULA (*surprised*) Gone?

GRIDLEY and PATCH Yes Gone

URSULA But my father—Lord Cottingley—has he gone?

GRIDLEY and PATCH (*in cheerful sing-song*) Yes, yes Gone

URSULA Damned cheek of him! (*She stares at them sceptically*)
D'you know, it wouldn't surprise me if you were all lying

HILDA (*with virtuous indignation*) How dare you!

URSULA (*to HILDA*) Don't be silly You must have had to do quite a lot of lying lately The famous Meddleworth nurse! I recognised you this morning And now you can tell me what the particularly dirty work was that Sir Eric was up to

HILDA (*scornfully*) Don't be so disgusting

URSULA (*cheerfully*) And don't you be such an awful little lower middle-class prig

HILDA After what I've just seen, I prefer to be a lower middle-class prig, thank you

URSULA All right But what *have* you just seen? That's what I want to know

HILDA (*with cutting scorn*) The court was crowded with silly girls and women, all specially dressed for the occasion

URSULA And that's why you didn't like 'em Their clothes were too good

HILDA They were all whispering and giggling, all hoping to hear every dirty thing they'd ever dreamed of I can't tell you how much I despised them——

URSULA Or me

HILDA Or you

URSULA It's just envy, nurse You'll get over it

HILDA (*forcefully*) It's not envy And I don't want to get over it I hope that never in my life again have I even to look at people like you It's time we saw that you cost more than you're worth You're not real women, of any use to the world You're just a set of useless, expensive mischievous—dolls (*She turns away and marches off*)

URSULA (*moving forward, angrily*) Hey, wait a minute! You're not going to get away with that

She is about to make after her, but is stopped by PATCH

PATCH And you wait a minute Where's your boy friend in the blue shirt?

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URSULA Captain Mellock's down there (*Goes to side, and calls*)
Captain Mellock! Oo-oo! (*Turns*) But he won't be too tired to
handle you two again, I expect (*Almost to herself*) And now for
that blasted nursemaid

*She goes off hurriedly, after HILDA PATCH and GRIDLEY
deliberately pick up the iron bars they brought on earlier, look at
them, then at one another*

PATCH (*grinning*) For the captain?

GRIDLEY For the noble captain

PATCH Length o' rope too?

GRIDLEY No, don't think so

*They go slowly up to the entrance, moving so that one is at
each side*

Bob, he may use that gun

PATCH I know But we can't lie down to it twice There's a limit

GRIDLEY That's the answer Spoken like a man, boy

*They hear him coming up the ladder and wait—on their toes
When he arrives, he is even dustier and more tired than URSULA
He is carrying a bottle of whisky and a packet of sandwiches They
go for him at once and though he manages to draw his gun—for
he carries both parcels with one hand—they are too much for him
GRIDLEY has him by one arm and the back of his neck PATCH
is twisting the arm that holds the gun*

PATCH Drop the gun, or I'll break your arm into little pieces,
general

*PATCH gets the gun He unloads it at once, throwing the bullets
away*

GRIDLEY Going to keep quiet now, Deadwood Dick?

MELLOCK (*wearily*) Yes Two to one Besides, I'm tired Mind
if I sit down?

*He limps to a seat The other two stand near him He sighs and
mops his brow*

Been walking for the last hour and a half

PATCH Why?

MELLOCK (*wearily*) My car broke down Don't know what was
the matter with it Don't know what's the matter with that girl either
Beats me

PATCH There's a lot o' things the matter with that girl But what
happened?

MELLOCK I've been away so long, I don't know what to make of
these girls They're all new to me!

PATCH Ask us We know We've had 'em as passengers

MELLOCK Well, to begin with I couldn't help the damned car breaking down And at first she didn't mind She said "Let's go and sit in the wood"

GRIDLEY and PATCH (*together significantly*) Ah!

MELLOCK We sat in the wood and I told her a few of my yarns Then she suddenly lost her temper, set off walking here, and at full tilt——

PATCH What did you do to her in the wood?

MELLOCK Nothing

GRIDLEY and PATCH *look at one another significantly*

I don't pretend to be better than the next fellow——

PATCH (*with faint mockery*) Quite, quite

MELLOCK But I know when it's up to me to behave like a gentleman I mean to say, with a fine kid like that—her father a big pot—you know——

GRIDLEY (*with ironic air of simplicity*) Yes, yes, yes

MELLOCK And yet she goes and loses her temper

PATCH (*with mock sympathy*) And you'd done nothing at all

MELLOCK Not a thing

PATCH (*with mock gravity*) It's what I've always said, Sam Women—are queer

GRIDLEY Bob's said it, Captain They're queer

MELLOCK Well, I've known a few who were all right——

PATCH (*same mocking tone*) So have we, so have we Haven't we, Sam?

MELLOCK But this one beats me I don't understand how things are going here nowadays (*Looking about him, then sharply*) How did you fellows get out? Where are the others—Lord Cottingley—that Communist chap, Gaster?

GRIDLEY and PATCH *eye one another across him, wondering what to invent*

I saw a police sergeant down the road Had he been here?

GRIDLEY and PATCH *nod gravely*

Well—what's happened?

GRIDLEY (*very slowly*) Well—it's a long story

PATCH (*very slowly*) And a very strange story—too

GRIDLEY (*solemnly*) Ve-er-ry strange

URSULA *enters as he speaks*

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URSULA What is?

MELLOCK *rises*

PATCH (*both he and GRIDLEY talk with an air of idiotic simplicity from now on*) We promised Sergeant Wilks—that's the policeman you saw—and a nice chap——

GRIDLEY (*solemnly*) A very nice chap indeed, Sergeant Wilks

PATCH We promised him not to tell anybody I think (*confidentially*) he's frightened of a local panic They're very nervous round here Aren't they, Sam?

GRIDLEY Nervous as sick kittens And that must have been it, Bob He's afraid there'll be a panic

URSULA (*after exchanging look of bewilderment with MELLOCK*) What on earth are you talking about?

PATCH (*confidentially*) It didn't matter to us, you see, because whatever it turns out to be, well—we've both been vaccinated and inoculated lately We have to be

GRIDLEY (*following helpfully*) That's right Regular vaccination and inoculation And it pays in the long run You—er—never know what's going to happen

URSULA and MELLOCK *stare at them and at each other, open-mouthed*

PATCH Mind you, Sam, it may not be that at all We can't tell what poor old Slivers has got——

MELLOCK Who's Slivers?

As they do not reply, GRIDLEY shaking his head at PATCH,

URSULA *cuts in*

URSULA Is he the man you had locked in that cabin? (*As they do not reply*) He is, isn't he?

They nod

Well, what's the matter with him?

PATCH It was the only thing we could do, you know Until the doctor came

MELLOCK (*not liking this*) The doctor?

URSULA Come on What's the matter with him?,

They are obviously reluctant to answer

He was taken ill, wasn't he?

PATCH All hot and flushed Then breaking into spots

GRIDLEY (*warningly*) Bob! You know, we promised

URSULA Don't be idiotic You've got to tell us

PATCH (*with feigned reluctance*) Spots All over his face and hands——

GRIDLEY You could see them coming on him, before your very eyes About that size (*Indicates*) No bigger (*Shows them*)

PATCH But as I said to your father and the others “Well, it may be nothing Just chicken-pox” We’ll have to fumigate the cabin, of course——

GRIDLEY (*gravely*) We’ll have to fumigate all that alleyway, Bob But we’re talking too much You know what Wilks said——

URSULA (*to MELLOCK*) Here, I’m off (*As he doesn’t move*) Come on If you want to catch small-pox or scarlet fever or whatever it is, I don’t And if we hang about here they’ll be coming back to fumigate us or vaccinate us or something We’ll hurry back to the wood and take your car

MELLOCK How can we? It won’t go

URSULA (*exploding*) Of course it will, you idiot

MELLOCK (*shouting*) Don’t call me an idiot You know damned well it won’t go

URSULA (*shouting*) I know damned well it won’t go when I turn off the ignition and take the key

MELLOCK (*astounded*) Take the key! But you didn’t

URSULA I did—right under your great fat silly nose (*She takes a key out of her bag or pocket and hurls it on to the deck, then turns away and goes*)

MELLOCK (*urgently, after picking up the key*) But where did that Communist go? I was told to look after him

GRIDLEY He was sure it was small-pox Where was he going, Bob, Plymouth?

PATCH No Norwich

GRIDLEY That’s it Norwich I know he was in a great hurry

URSULA *hastily reappears at entrance*

URSULA (*shouting to MELLOCK*) Are you coming, you idiot?

MELLOCK (*moving forward*) Yes, but I’ll have to go to Norwich

URSULA (*shouting as she goes*) All right then, let’s go to Norwich I’ve never been

MELLOCK *hurries after her* PATCH, *who is still holding revolver, goes to side and looks down*

PATCH Hoy—Mellock! You might want this

He throws revolver over and waves good-bye, grinning

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

GRIDLEY We're on the move, boy We're getting somewhere
I'll go look for Fletherington

*As he goes out HILDA comes in and looks at PATCH, who is still
staring over the side*

HILDA Where's that girl going?

PATCH (*grinning*) Running off with Deadwood Dick in the blue
shirt, I think

HILDA (*scornfully*) She would! She's that kind of girl

PATCH That's it Hello, she's left the whisky and those packets,
probably grub

HILDA That's the kind of girl all men seem to like

PATCH (*investigating the packages now*) Not me Didn't interest
me in the least Terrible type! They're sandwiches (*Examines them
with interest*)

HILDA She was pretty, though Don't you think?

PATCH Yes—pretty-ish Have a sandwich I'm going to

They both take and eat sandwiches

No, I've seen too many of that sort—

HILDA (*without enthusiasm*) Oh!

PATCH I mean—among passengers

HILDA Yes, of course, we all know what some girls are like when
they're passengers—

PATCH (*hastily*) Don't you believe it All exaggerated—worse—
(*he nearly says "luck", but then collects himself*)—than anything's
exaggerated

HILDA (*shyly*), I expect you know—plenty of girls—

PATCH (*shyly*) Why do you say that? You're not thinking of what
Sam—your uncle—said, are you?

HILDA (*slowly*) No—but—after all, officer of a ship—and—rather
good-looking—and—

PATCH What about you, then?

HILDA (*laughing*) I'm not an officer of a ship—

PATCH No, but you're very pretty

HILDA Do you think so?

PATCH Yes, the moment I saw you

HILDA I'm not very pretty And I'm not very interesting Just—
ordinary

PATCH No, you're not ordinary

HILDA Well, I do my work quite well And I've had a very good
training—Truby-King

ACT II " BEES ON THE BOAT DECK

PATCH I suppose—you do very well out of your job, don't you?

HILDA Yes, not bad I like my work too, though I shouldn't like to think I was never going to do anything but look after other people's children

PATCH (*rather bitterly*) I've had a good training too—served my apprenticeship—passed examinations—have my master's certificate But look at me now

HILDA (*softly*) I know And I think it's a shame

PATCH You can make more money than I can

HILDA That's not your fault

PATCH No—just my misfortune I liked ships, you see I was a mug I ought to have learned to play the saxophone or to work the tote at greyhound races—something really useful

HILDA (*troubled*) You're very bitter—aren't you?—underneath

PATCH I'm sorry Got nothing to be bitter—with you—about, Hilda

HILDA Yes—in a way, you have, even with me But—I don't think money ought to count—do you?

PATCH *turns away, sharply, picks up the paper-covered whisky bottle and takes the outer wrapping off She watches him, deeply moved, and once makes a gesture towards him She wants to say something, do something, to comfort him, but while she hesitates GRIDLEY enters, from cabin entrance He is looking much cleaner and neater than he did As soon as he comes in, HILDA moves out right back*

GRIDLEY (*heartily*) Started to look for Fletherington, but decided to clean myself up first Feel better for it Ready for 'em all, Bob What are you going to do with that whisky?

PATCH (*rather gloomily*) Drink it

GRIDLEY No Give it to poor old Slivers He's been in captivity longest and a few drinks might do him a bit o'good

PATCH Might be useful, too All right (*Moving towards cabin entrance*) Then I'll comb the ship for Fletherington He's probably got stuck in a ventilator or a watertight door by this time

GRIDLEY You do that and I'll get rid of— Now who is it we get rid of next? Cottingley?

PATCH (*moving off*) No, not before Fletherington. There's the Communist

GRIDLEY By criminy!—so there is I'd forgotten about him I'll have him out now

PATCH *has now gone back right GRIDLEY hastens out through*

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

cabin entrance, and soon returns with GASTER, who is looking hot and miserable

GRIDLEY (*as they enter*) Yes, you'd better get back to Longport as quick as you can. You've plenty to do there, and nothing here. There'll be no blowing up. And we've just had a police sergeant here (*Sees the sandwiches and goes over to them*). Now what you want before you go is a sandwich.

They both eat a sandwich

GASTER Did that Fascist come back?

GRIDLEY He did, but he's gone for a razzle with Cottingley's daughter.

GASTER (*contemptuously*) That's what they would do. Well, they'd better make the most of their opportunities. They won't have 'em much longer.

GRIDLEY It's a pity you couldn't have gone on the razzle with her instead of him. He's had too many. You've never had enough—if any. In fact, that's what's the matter with you. You've never had any fun, have you?

GASTER How can I and my class have "fun"—as you call it—when all the time ?

GRIDLEY (*interrupting*) All the time—nothing! People who want a bit o' fun, have a bit o' fun, class or no class.

GASTER (*eagerly*) We are not opposed to the people enjoying themselves. We want fun for all workers.

GRIDLEY I know, and when they get it, what will it be? Mass physical jerks every other Tuesday in the public park.

GASTER (*after looking round, confidentially*) Comrade, you're not a right-wing swine, a rotten counter-revolutionary, I'm sure. Now this ship's nicely out of the way, yet not too far from Longport. Don't you think we might use it for party work?

GRIDLEY No, I don't. To begin with, if I allowed that, I wouldn't be doing my duty—

GASTER (*sneering*) Your duty!

GRIDLEY That's what I said. And don't be in such a hurry to laugh at it either. Suppose you get your revolution, what then? The first thing you'll want is a lot of people who can be relied on to do their duty—just that. And if you've laughed 'em all out of it before that, you'll find yourselves in a nice pickle. You'll be having to shoot managers and foremen in batches—Russian style!

GASTER There are duties and duties. Our first duty is to the revolution, the proletarian state, the real community—

GRIDLEY And anything else that's large and fine and a long way off But what you'll want—you'll find—is a lot o' people who'll know it's their duty to keep a bearing oiled, a certain light burning, a wheel trimmed to a compass, and will see that they do their duty Just be careful you don't throw 'em all overboard, to make room for a mob o' lazy whining sea-lawyers and Pacific Coast I W W men, who can break anything and mend nothing Don't let too much loose When I was a young man, I was in the *Theodosia* when she went down, full o' passengers I saw a lot let loose that time It put twenty years on me I used to be a clever wild young devil up to then I thought I knew it all That showed me what I knew

GASTER But I guarantee it was really the fault of the owners that ship was wrecked

GRIDLEY Bad owners and bad sailors, both Don't you see, it's not just a case of the haves and the have-nots There are men about—a few—and there are monkeys—millions of 'em I try to be a man If the Communist Party owned this ship, and employed me, I'd do my duty by them

GASTER And who does own this ship? The workers——

GRIDLEY - And who the hell are they? Don't start telling me the riveters and carpenters really own this ship——

GASTER It was their labour——

GRIDLEY Most of 'em wouldn't know whether they were making a ship or a skating rink And wouldn't care All most of them think about is beer and football, and they don't even know so dam' much about them I don't want a party, yours or anybody else's I don't care about capitalists and proletarians, masses and bosses, red shirts, black shirts, brown shirts, green shirts I want to see some men about, real men who know what sense is, and duty is, and order is (*Shouting*) I'm getting on, my time's running out, and I'm tired of living among millions of howling monkeys For God's sake, show me some men

A pause

GASTER (*eagerly*) And where will you find this sense, this order, you talk about? Only——

PATCH *enters hurriedly*

PATCH Hoy! We're not going to have another session of Karl Marx We've too much to do (*Pointedly, to GASTER*) Good afternoon

GASTER (*with dignity*) Good afternoon (*Moves away towards exit, then turns to speak, with sincerity and passion*) You're blind, both of you In the end you will have to come to us That capitalist

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

Cottingley will go on cheating you That Fascist will come again and threaten you with his gun This ship you are so anxious to protect will be taken from you Then there will be nothing left for you but despair and death—or the living force of the revolution Good day, comrades

Goes out with dignity They watch him go, impressed Then they look at one another for a moment, whistling softly

PATCH (*urgently*) We've found Fletherington He'd fallen and hurt himself a bit Hilda's giving him first aid again And they've practically fixed it for him to take her to that farm he's staying at

GRIDLEY (*excitedly*) We're moving, boy, we're moving That only leaves Cottingley Let's get Fletherington away—and Hilda—as soon as we can Then it's all set, Bob, it's all set

PATCH We'll have done the lot of 'em in

Enter FLEATHERINGTON, carrying his bag He has two fresh pieces of sticking plaster on his face, one hand is wrapped up, and he is limping His clothes are rather torn and dirty in places But he is still beaming

FLEATHERINGTON Miss Jackson is just putting her things together She'll be here in a moment Very nice useful sort of girl I'm sure my wife will be glad if we can be of any service to her

PATCH Well, see you go straight back to that farm No more funny work

GRIDLEY No Your wife's looking for you, y'know

FLEATHERINGTON Yes I remember now there was something about a picnic She may be annoyed I shall have to let Miss Jackson explain some of it My wife will soon understand She's an unusually sensible woman, really

GRIDLEY (*briskly*) See you stick to her then That's what we want now Gumption! Savvy! Downright horse sense! By crikey!—there isn't much of it about Plenty of brains, but no sense

FLEATHERINGTON (*with a sigh*) You're probably right I myself have a fairly good brain—

PATCH (*briskly*) Put you in a lab—and no doubt you're fine But outside it—you're practically barmy

GRIDLEY (*briskly*) Never go out without the missis Stick to her Take my tip

PATCH Got all your explosive doings in the bag?

FLEATHERINGTON (*smiling, holding the bag up*) Yes, everything

GRIDLEY (*carefully taking the bag from him, then holding it up with both hands*) Well, watch yourself with it

As he says this, SERGEANT WILKS slowly comes on board They do not notice him They should form a fairly wide group, just downstage of centre

You don't mean any harm That's not your trouble at all Your trouble is this——

Here the SERGEANT coughs, and GRIDLEY notices him

GRIDLEY (*in a fury of exasperation*) Oh, jiminy!—— (*In his exasperation he hurls the bag down with enormous force*)

PATCH (*jumping back and yelling*) Look out!

All three jump back, then watch the bag agonisingly A muffled report is heard from inside it, and smoke comes out They watch it, hardly breathing The smoke begins to dwindle PATCH and GRIDLEY, completely limp, begin to breathe again and mop their brows FLEATHERINGTON looks worried and advances on the bag

FLEATHERINGTON That's very disappointing It ought to have detonated the whole explosive—— (*Has now arrived at bag and is about to open it*)

PATCH and GRIDLEY (*together, alarmed*) Hoy!

FLEATHERINGTON (*reassuringly*) No, no, quite safe now Unfortunately (*Opens the bag A little smoke comes out Puts his hand in and pulls out some crystals*) Yes, there's been some reaction to atmosphere in these crystals I'll have to guard against that——

PATCH (*hurrying to his side, urgently*) Get out, quick, before the sergeant starts asking questions Wait for Hilda in the wood

FLEATHERINGTON (*shutting bag*) Yes, yes, of course Well, good-bye, Mr Gridley Good-bye, Mr Patch (*Goes straight up to SERGEANT, who is still near exit, and smiles at him broadly*) Good afternoon——er——officer

Limps out briskly SERGEANT WILKS is still too dazed to stop him, then looks after him and then at GRIDLEY and PATCH, as if wondering which lot to tackle Decides on the latter, who are whistling softly and anxiously, and comes forward

SERGEANT WILKS (*slowly and suspiciously*) What's going on round here?

PATCH *goes back to keep an eye on the deck along which HILDA would come*

GRIDLEY Nautical work, sergeant, nautical work You wouldn't understand

PATCH We're busy, sergeant

SERGEANT WILKS What at?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PATCH (*mysteriously*) Overhauling the winches, bollards, bulk-heads, capstans, gaffs, luffs, puffs and larboard jib-boo-bas

GRIDLEY (*loudly, despairingly*) Sergeant, the cockleshaft bearing—like us, sergeant, like us—is rusty, creaky, groaning, half-rotten I must take it out, give it linseed oil, wipe it with cotton waste, tickle it with goose feathers

PATCH (*same note of loud despair*) How'd you like to be tickled with goose feathers, sergeant? And with Orion over the port bow?

GRIDLEY (*same note*) How'd you like your junior compensator to be packed tight with dead hornet queens and hairy caterpillars, the breast feathers of green woodpeckers, and dandelion fluff by the peck?

PATCH (*same note*) With not a glass hammer for miles, wild strawberries round the anchor chain, night coming on, the moon rising among the pine trees?

GRIDLEY (*crazily*) By God!—sergeant—it's unbearable

PATCH (*shouting in a mock passion*) Yes—and don't forget it

GRIDLEY (*now in tiny whisper*) But otherwise—all's quiet

PATCH (*also in tiny whisper*) Quieter than a nest of silkworms
Good afternoon

The SERGEANT is still staring from one to the other in bewilderment and silence, when the quiet is broken by the noise of a door smashing off through cabin entrance The SERGEANT looks in that direction at once PATCH and GRIDLEY look at one another and begin whistling softly Before GRIDLEY, who is nearer, can take more than a step towards cabin entrance, LORD COTTINGLEY appears in it He is extremely hot and untidy, and should look like a man who has just succeeded in forcing a heavy cabin door
LORD COTTINGLEY (*breathing deeply and taking in the group*) Ah!
SERGEANT WILKS And—er——

LORD COTTINGLEY (*sharply, impressively*) Sergeant!

SERGEANT WILKS (*promptly*) Sir!

LORD COTTINGLEY I'm Lord Cottingley, formerly a director of the company that owns this ship—— (*He stops, thinking about something*)

SERGEANT WILKS Yes, your lordship——

LORD COTTINGLEY *is still thinking*

PATCH (*sardonically*) Took to one another at once, didn't they?

GRIDLEY Brothers under the skin

LORD COTTINGLEY (*making up his mind, decisively*) Sergeant, I may want you in a minute, so don't go away

SERGEANT *moves back and towards left a few paces*

That's right I just want to have a word with these two officers Mr Patch

Brings both of them downstage, stands between them, and addresses them confidentially

I seem to have forced that cabin door just at the right moment, don't I? I ought to give you straight in charge—for that and for several other things But I'll give you a last chance As I told you before, Gridley, I believe in minding my own business If people don't interfere with me, I won't interfere with them Now then—leave me alone, and you're all right—which includes that girl you're hiding here But if you won't make me that promise, then I tell that sergeant everything I know

A pause

PATCH (*quietly, earnestly*) Sam, I'd do a lot to keep Hilda safe

GRIDLEY (*impatiently*) Yes, yes, so would I

PATCH Not as much as I would, Sam You understand?

GRIDLEY Yes, I see, Bob But it's no good It won't do You understand too, don't you, lad?

PATCH Yes That's all right, Sam

LORD COTTINGLEY Well——?

GRIDLEY We're making no bargains with you

LORD COTTINGLEY You mean——?

PATCH (*roughly*) You know what we mean Go on and do your damndest

LORD COTTINGLEY (*forcefully, breaks up the group, turning and calling SERGEANT*) Sergeant, I charge these two men with forcibly keeping me here, locked in a cabin I had to break the door down

SERGEANT WILKS (*horrified*) No?

LORD COTTINGLEY (*continuing briskly*) They did it for two good reasons First, they're hiding here the Jackson girl, the missing witness in the Meddleworth Case——

SERGEANT WILKS Coo——!

LORD COTTINGLEY (*same tone*) And secondly, because they've been keeping here, also under lock and key, some local man who found the girl here—a man—er—liver—liver——

SERGEANT WILKS (*tremendously impressed*) Not Shivers?

LORD COTTINGLEY That's the man—Shivers

SERGEANT WILKS And I came here and asked about that very man—just friendly, in a nice way—not an hour since T-t-t-t (*Produces*

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

notebook in ponderous fashion, then looks severely at GRIDLEY and PATCH) This'll get you both into a lot o' trouble, a lot o' trouble (*Solemnly*) You 'ave 'eard his lordship's charges? What is your statement in reply to same?

PATCH and GRIDLEY (*together, promptly*) Barmy!

LORD COTTINGLEY (*impatiently*) Never mind statements, man, you can get them afterwards Search the ship Get your evidence

SERGEANT WILKS (*putting away notebook*) Right, your lordship

PATCH and GRIDLEY *exchange glances*

GRIDLEY Come on I'll take you round

LORD COTTINGLEY Now mind, don't let him bluff you Artful fella, very artful fella!

SERGEANT *goes out through cabin entrance with GRIDLEY close behind, and very much taking charge of him As soon as the SERGEANT is off, PATCH quickly picks up one of the iron bars they brought on at beginning of Act and goes up to LORD COTTINGLEY menacingly*

PATCH Now listen, you old twister, you raise your voice these next two minutes, and I'll flatten you with this For two pins I'd take a crack at you now with it I've always wanted to set about a bad owner and this is my chance

LORD COTTINGLEY (*who is frightened*) You—try—anything of that sort—and I've only to call the sergeant—

PATCH (*terribly ferocious*) That's just what you won't do, see? Try it, and you'll find yourself flat on that deck—out!

HILDA *appears rather timidly from back entrance right, carrying her bag PATCH motions her to leave the ship at once LORD COTTINGLEY turns and sees her*

LORD COTTINGLEY (*loudly*) There—

PATCH *puts one hand over his mouth and holds the iron bar to his head, as if ready to lay him out with it LORD COTTINGLEY grows purple PATCH addresses HILDA with urgency*

PATCH Quick, Hilda The little man's waiting for you in the wood Hurry! And I'll see you again, won't I?

HILDA (*standing now at entrance to gangway*) If you want to—please, Bob And you—won't—let anything—make any difference—to us, will you?

PATCH No Hurry And God bless you!

She hurries away, and now he talks to LORD COTTINGLEY, still keeping his hand over LORD COTTINGLEY's mouth

LORD COTTINGLEY (*muffled*) Let go I can't breathe

PATCH Promise not to shout then

LORD COTTINGLEY I won't

PATCH (*menacingly*) All right then——

LORD COTTINGLEY Yes, I will Damn you!

PATCH (*letting him go, politely*) Have a sandwich They're your sandwiches Your daughter and the Captain brought them back

LORD COTTINGLEY Where are they?

PATCH (*offering him sandwiches*) Here

LORD COTTINGLEY (*irritably*) No, not the sandwiches No——
(*as PATCH removes them*)—don't take 'em away I'm hungry

PATCH Well, make up your mind then

LORD COTTINGLEY (*taking a sandwich and eating it hungrily*) My daughter and Captain Mellock—where are they?

PATCH They were here not half an hour ago They wouldn't stay Just looked in and then were off

LORD COTTINGLEY But they ought to have been back here hours ago

PATCH (*with innocent air*) Yes, but their car broke down and then they sat in a wood—for quite a long time, he told me

LORD COTTINGLEY (*who does not like the sound of this*) Sat in a wood! Did they seem—very friendly!

PATCH (*same innocent air*) Well—no, they didn't She was calling him an idiot And he told me he didn't know what was the matter with her

LORD COTTINGLEY I don't like the sound of this Where did they go? And *why* did they go? (*As PATCH is silent*) Come along. Tell me

PATCH Well—er—it's awkward——

LORD COTTINGLEY (*furiously*) Mr Patch—that girl's my daughter—the only one I've got Now tell me the truth

PATCH All right, Lord Cottingley This is exactly what happened She made a move to go ashore and said "Are you coming, you idiot?" And he said "Yes, but I'll have to go to Norwich" And she said "All right, then, let's go to Norwich I've never been" Now those are the exact words And off they both went

LORD COTTINGLEY Patch, if this is a bluff, it's a damned dirty one

PATCH Well, it's not a bluff

LORD COTTINGLEY I know the girl's crazy enough for anything—a gunman from God knows where! He can't afford to marry her

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PATCH Marriage wasn't mentioned I've told you all that was

LORD COTTINGLEY (*urgently*) I know You couldn't have invented that Did you say they left not half an hour ago?

PATCH Yes You've still got time

LORD COTTINGLEY (*impressively*) My God, I'd better have

He is hurrying out just as WILKS enters

SERGEANT WILKS (*pompously*) Your Lordship——

LORD COTTINGLEY (*hurrying off*) Brrrr! Don't bother me I'm in a hurry

He goes WILKS stares after him, then at PATCH, who is grinning now

SERGEANT WILKS There's no girl here

PATCH No, of course not

SERGEANT WILKS But what's the matter with his lordship?

PATCH Didn't you know?

SERGEANT WILKS Know what?

PATCH He's barmy

SERGEANT WILKS Barmy?

PATCH Clean off his nut I tried to tip you the wink when he was talking about charging us, but you wouldn't look at me He'd charge anybody with anything, he would Talks to you one minute, then the next minute he's running like the devil somewhere Doesn't remember anything Just runs off like a four-year-old Oh—we know him well

SERGEANT WILKS Somebody ought to be looking after him—going round like that He might have got me into trouble

PATCH Of course he might That's what I always say It isn't good enough

SERGEANT WILKS (*looking at PATCH suspiciously*) Here, but what about Mr Slivers? Is he here or isn't he?

PATCH (*hesitating*) Well, in a manner of speaking—yes But looked at from another point of view—you might say—no

SERGEANT WILKS What d'you mean Either he's here or he isn't here

At this point SLIVERS' voice, loud and drunken, can be heard off, coming nearer He is singing

PATCH (*hearing this*) That's right Well—he's here

Enter SLIVERS, who is being supported by GRIDLEY, who also carries the whisky bottle, now half-emptied SLIVERS is very ruffled, tight, and merry in his own fashion

SLIVERS (*singing*)

Whe-hen the ler-hove bird leaves its nest
Der-hoes it fler-hy tew the East or the West—

GRIDLEY Steady, my hearty Steady

SERGEANT WILKS (*astounded*) Now who'd have believed it? Never seen him this way before

SLIVERS *laughs idiotically*

GRIDLEY Well, he can't be for ever just wrapping up cheese and then seeing what it says in the paper

SLIVERS (*with drunken gravity*) Chee-sh? Didn'd I bring you shum chee-sh sh'morning? Canadian Cheddar?

PATCH Yes, you did, old boy

SLIVERS Well—don'd ead id—muck!—— (*Shouting*) Muck, I shay! (*Glares defiantly at them all*)

GRIDLEY You see? He's got to turn into a man some time Up to now he's been something cut out of a penny paper

SERGEANT WILKS (*sternly to SLIVERS*) Your wife's been looking for you

SLIVERS Led her look (*Impressively*) I've had mos' peculiar day I'll tell you Qued, ser'n'd, quued, while I tell you Mos' peculiar Now listen Now then (*Here he sticks, so appeals to GRIDLEY*) Whad happened, Mister Grididdly?

GRIDLEY You've been asleep in that cabin and you've been drinking whisky—this whisky

Shows him bottle He tries to take it

Oh no, Mr Slivers, my old buck, you've had enough

SERGEANT WILKS Too much You'd better come along home with me

SLIVERS Cerdainly, cerdainly (*Moves unsteadily over to him*)

SERGEANT WILKS Come on then (*Quietly to GRIDLEY and PATCH*) The less said about this, the better Respected shopkeeper—wouldn't sound well Quite understand why you kept him close Come along, Mr Slivers

SLIVERS (*solemnly*) All ri', I'm coming, but there's jus' one thing I wanda say, ser'n'd, before I go Jus' one thing I wanda ask—jus' one—

SERGEANT WILKS All right Ask it then

SLIVERS *solemnly surveys them, as if about to make some important pronouncement, then suddenly breaks into song again*

SLIVERS (*singing*)

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

Whe-hen the ler-hove bird leaves its nest
Der-hoes it fly tew the East or the West —

SERGEANT *supports him firmly and half carries him off* GRIDLEY
and PATCH *watch them go* Then GRIDLEY *waves a jubilant fare-*
well with the whisky bottle over the side, while PATCH darts off to
cabin entrance and returns at once with two glasses

GRIDLEY (*as PATCH returns*) That's the last of 'em, Bob

PATCH The very last of 'em, Sam

GRIDLEY (*with growing excitement*) Boy, we've fooled 'em

PATCH (*same mood*) Dished 'em

GRIDLEY Tangled 'em

PATCH Diddled 'em

GRIDLEY The whole squint-eyed—

PATCH Fish-faced, lop-sided—

GRIDLEY Addle-pated, crack-brained—

PATCH Barmy lot of 'em

GRIDLEY (*solemnly*) We drink to this, boy

PATCH We've earned it

GRIDLEY We've earned a month of it (*Pours whisky into glasses*
Holds up his own) The good ship *Gloriana!* (*Drinks*)

PATCH Here's to her next sailing! (*Drinks*)

GRIDLEY May we be sailing her! (*Drinks*)

PATCH And never miss a tide! (*Drinks*)

GRIDLEY And— (*notices glass is empty*) Oh!—well, might as
well finish it now, boy, might as well finish it We've earned it
(*Empties bottle into the two glasses, puts bottle down*)

PATCH And a sandwich

Gets them They both come down to the chairs and seat them-
selves luxuriously, sprawling at ease The chairs should be so
placed that there is a fair space between them, and so that neither
sitter sees the back

PATCH (*scornfully*) Blow her up! T-t-t-t

GRIDLEY Barmy, the whole lot of 'em

They are now eating sandwiches, and taking occasional sips of
whisky, very much at ease

What a day!

PATCH What a day!

GRIDLEY But here she still is—the good old *Gloriana!*

PATCH Here she still is!

GRIDLEY (*good-humouredly*) Now that it's quiet again—and the last loony's gone and we've saved the ship—you'll start grumbling again, I suppose

PATCH No, Sam, I shan't I've got something—somebody—to think about now

GRIDLEY But mind you, though I like it quiet—when things start happening, I'm there, I'm on the spot, I'm in control—

PATCH I didn't do so badly, either

GRIDLEY You didn't, Bob, you didn't We both did well There was our duty

PATCH And we did it

GRIDLEY (*finishes eating and drinking now, and pulls out his copy of Schopenhauer*) This is what we want Calms the mind Gives you a big view of things (*Begins reading*) "The wish is, in its nature, pain, the attainment soon begets satiety, the end was only apparent, possession takes away the charm"

PATCH (*interrupting very earnestly*) Sam, I'm a pal, aren't I? We've stood together, haven't we?

GRIDLEY Yes, Bob

PATCH Will you do something for me, Sam? (*As GRIDLEY nods*) Give me that book

GRIDLEY, *rather surprised, hands it over* PATCH *takes it and throws it off the ship, either back or forward, into the orchestral pit*

GRIDLEY (*annoyed*) Here, Bob, what the—

PATCH (*earnestly*) Sam, I couldn't put up with any more of that miserable old devil He takes the heart out of you If you'd believed everything he wrote, you'd never have done what you have done to-day—and this ship would have been for it He couldn't have saved a ship He couldn't have saved a mousetrap

GRIDLEY (*deeply reflecting, thoughtfully*) You might be right, boy, you might be right

PATCH I know I am Try another chap—if only for a change

GRIDLEY (*thoughtfully*) I might have a go at Thomas Carlyle Old Jock MacClean, who was my first chief in the *Moriana*, used to swear by Thomas Carlyle, and he was a man, Jock MacClean They wouldn't have talked about blowing ships up when he was about

PATCH They'll think twice about it next time when we're about

MR TOOKE *has entered quietly He is a clerkly little middle-aged man, now in rather incongruous holiday clothes He does not see them at first, but looks about him, then notices them and comes*

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

forward, giving a slight cough They turn in their chairs and stare at him

MR TOOKE (*standing between them*) Good afternoon (*Smilingly*) Didn't see you at first, gentlemen Mr Gridley and Mr Patch, isn't it?

GRIDLEY (*sitting up*) Yes And I've seen you before, surely?

TOOKE (*beaming*) Of course Don't you remember? Tooke, from Head Office

PATCH That's it Mr Tooke, from Head Office Know you now It was your sporting outfit that put me off

TOOKE Well, as a matter of fact, I'm killing two birds with one stone

GRIDLEY Oh? Are we the two birds?

TOOKE Well, you see, I'm just beginning my holidays, and we've come to a little place just the other side of Longport, my wife's cousin keeps the establishment So I said I'd come myself and bring you the message from Head Office You're both to report there as soon as possible

GRIDLEY Ah!

PATCH Oh-ho!

TOOKE (*casually now*) Yes, both go and see Commander Watson (*Looks round*) Quite nice here, isn't it? We've had the surveyors' reports on this ship, y'know Quite hopeless, of course Never ought to have been brought here

GRIDLEY and PATCH, *sitting upright now, look at one another, then at TOOKE*

GRIDLEY (*slowly*) Oh—er—what are they—

PATCH (*slowly*) Going to do with her?

TOOKE (*very casually*) Oh—blow her up, I think

Looks at them, smiling foolishly GRIDLEY and PATCH like men exasperated beyond all speech by the insanity of things, slowly get up and do their whistling duet for the last time As they are doing this and TOOKE is staring at them, his smile slowly fading into bewilderment, the curtain slowly falls

END OF PLAY

WHEN WE ARE MARRIED

A Yorkshire Farcical Comedy

CHARACTERS

RUBY BIRTLE
GERALD FORBES
NANCY HOLMES
ALDERMAN JOSEPH HELLIWELL
MARIA HELLIWELL
COUNCILLOR ALBERT PARKER
ANNIE PARKER
HERBERT SOPPITT
CLARA SOPPITT
MRS NORTHROP
FRED DYSON
HENRY ORMONROYD
LOTTIE GRADY
REV CLEMENT MERCER

The sitting-room of Alderman Helliwell's house in Cleckleywyke, a town in the West Riding, on a September evening about thirty years ago

When we are Married—Copyright, 1938, by John Boynton Priestley
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*Produced at the St Martin's Theatre, London, on October 11th,
1938, with the following cast*

RUBY BIRTLE	PATRICIA HAYES
GERALD FORBES	RICHARD WARNER
NANCY HOLMES	BETTY FLEETWOOD
HELLIWELL	LLOYD PEARSON
MRS HELLIWELL	MURIEL GEORGE
PARKER	RAYMOND HUNTLEY
MRS PARKER	HELENA PICKARD
SOPPITT	ERNEST BUTCHER
MRS SOPPITT	ETHEL COLERIDGE
MRS NORTHROP	BEATRICE VARLEY
FRED DYSON	ALEXANDER GRANDISON
HENRY ORMONROYD	FRANK PETTINGELL
LOTTIE GRADY	MAI BACON
REV CLEMENT MERCER	NORMAN WOOLAND

Produced by BASIL DEAN

ACT I

The sitting-room in HELLIWELL'S house, a solid detached late-Victorian house On left (actor's left) wall is a window Left of centre in back wall is a door to rest of house, leading directly into the hall On right wall is a small conservatory, with door leading into this, and then into garden The room is furnished without taste in the style of about thirty years ago There is an upright piano Little cupboards, drawers, small tables, etc At rise, evening sunlight coming through window Nobody on stage

We hear the front door bell ring A moment later, RUBY BIRTLE ushers in GERALD FORBES RUBY is a very young "slavey" of the period, who looks as if her hair has just gone "up" FORBES is a pleasant young man, in the smart clothes of the period, and unlike RUBY and most of the other characters does not talk with a marked West Riding accent

RUBY You'll have to wait 'cos they haven't finished their tea

GERALD Bit late, aren't they?

RUBY (*approaching, confidentially*) It's a do

GERALD It's what?

RUBY A do Y'know, they've company

GERALD Oh—I see It's a sort of party, and they're having high tea

RUBY (*going closer still*) Roast pork, stand pie, salmon and salad, trifle, two kinds o' jellies, lemon cheese tarts, jam tarts, swiss tarts, sponge cake, walnut cake, chocolate roll, and a pound cake kept from last Christmas

GERALD (*with irony*) Is that all?

RUBY (*seriously*) No, there's white bread, brown bread, currant teacake, one o' them big curd tarts from Gregory's, and a lot o' cheese

GERALD It is a do, isn't it?

RUBY (*after nodding, then very confidentially*) And a little brown jug

GERALD (*astonished*) A little brown jug?

RUBY (*still confidentially*) You know what that is, don't you? Don't you? (*Laughs*) Well, I never did! Little brown jug's a drop

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

o' rum for your tea They're getting right lively on it (*Coolly*) But you don't come from round here, do you?

GERALD (*not disposed for a chat*) No

A distant bell rings, not front door

RUBY I come from near Rotherham Me father works in t' pit, and so does our Frank and our Wilfred

Distant bell sounds again

GERALD There's a bell ringing somewhere

RUBY (*coolly*) I know It's for me Let her wait She's run me off me legs to-day And Mrs Northrop's in t' kitchen—she can do a bit for a change There's seven of 'em at it in t' dining-room—Alderman Helliwell and missus, of course—then Councillor Albert Parker and Mrs Parker, and Mr Herbert Soppitt and Mrs Soppitt—and of course, Miss Holmes

GERALD Oh—Miss Holmes *is* there, is she?

RUBY Yes, but she's stopped eating (*Giggles Coolly*) You're courting her, aren't you?

GERALD (*astonished and alarmed*) What!

RUBY (*coolly*) Oh—I saw you both—the other night, near Cleckley Woods I was out meself with our milkman's lad

GERALD turns away

Now don't look like that, I won't tell on you

GERALD (*producing a shilling, then rather desperately*) Now—look here! What's your name?

RUBY Ruby Birtle

GERALD Well, Ruby, you wouldn't like Miss Holmes to get into a row here with her uncle and aunt, would you?

RUBY No, I wouldn't like that But I'd like that shilling

GERALD (*after giving it to her*) You said Miss Holmes had finished eating

RUBY Yes She can't put it away like some of 'em I'd rather keep Councillor Albert Parker a week than a fortnight D'you want to see her?

GERALD Yes Could you just give her the tip quietly that I'm here—if the rest of them aren't coming in here yet?

RUBY Not them! You'd think they'd been pined for a month—way they're going at it! I'll tell her She'd better come round that way—through t' greenhouse—

Before she can actually move, MRS NORTHROP, an aggressive but humorous working-woman of about fifty puts her head in the door

MRS NORTHROP (*aggressively*) Oh—'ere y'are!

RUBY (*coolly*) That's right, Mrs Northrop

MRS NORTHROP (*aggressively*) I see nought right about it—you gassin' in 'ere as if you owned t' place instead o' gettin' on wi' your work She's rung for yer twice, an' I've just taken another lot o' hot water in Nah, come on, yer little crackpot!

Holds door open, and RUBY goes to it—turns and grins Exit

RUBY

MRS NORTHROP Aren't you t' organist at chapel?

GERALD Yes

MRS NORTHROP (*cheerfully*) Ay, well, they've got it in for you

GERALD (*astomshed*) How do you know?

MRS NORTHROP 'Cos I 'eard 'em say so (*Complacently*) I don't miss much

GERALD So that's why Mr Helliwell asked me to come round and see him

MRS NORTHROP That's right There's three of 'em 'ere to-night, d'you see—all big men at chapel You've been enjoyin' yerself a bit too much, I fancy, lad

GERALD So that's it—is it?

MRS NORTHROP (*with very confidential air*) Ay—and d'you know what I say? I say—to 'ell with 'em!

Goes out, leaving GERALD looking a little worried He moves about restlessly, takes cigarette-case out of his pocket mechanically, then puts it back again He keeps an eye on the door into conservatory After a few moments, NANCY HOLMES, an attractive girl in her early twenties, hurries in through this door

NANCY (*in breathless whisper*) Gerald!

GERALD Nancy! (*Makes as if to kiss her*)

NANCY (*breathlessly*) No, you mustn't, not here—no, Gerald—please—

But he does kiss her and no harm has been done

Now, listen, Gerald, and be sensible This is serious You know why Uncle Joe sent for you?

GERALD (*with a slight grin*) They've got it in for me I've just been told

NANCY It's serious, Gerald They've been grumbling about you some time, and now, as far as I can gather, one of these miserable old beasts saw you late one night—with me—

GERALD (*serious now*) Oh—I say—you weren't recognised, were you?

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NANCY No But *you* were

GERALD Well, that's not so bad, as long as they can't drag you into it I know how strict your aunt is, and you can't afford to quarrel with them here until we're ready to be married—

NANCY (*earnestly*) No, but you can't either, Gerald And they're going to be very cross with you, and you'll have to be awfully careful what you say to them And there's that beastly Councillor Parker here too, and you loathe him, don't you?

GERALD Absolutely And I'll loathe him more than ever now that he's full of roast pork and trifle I think I'd better give them time to recover from that huge ghastly tuck-in they're having

NANCY I should Though they've nearly finished now

GERALD If I clear out for half an hour or so, could you slip away too?

NANCY I might They don't really want me I'm in the way You see, it's an anniversary celebration, and I don't come into it at all

GERALD What are they celebrating?

Before she can reply, RUBY opens door, announcing

RUBY It's *Yorkshire Argus*—two of 'em

GERALD *rises, moves down right* NANCY *rises up to door*

Enter FRED DYSON, a cheerful, rather cheeky youngish reporter, and HENRY ORMONROYD, who carries a large and old-fashioned newspaperman's camera and a flash-light apparatus ORMONROYD *is a middle-aged man with an air of beery dignity and wears a large drooping moustache* DYSON *walks down to NANCY*

RUBY This is Miss Holmes, Alderman Helliwell's niece T'others is still having their tea

RUBY *goes out*

DYSON (*cheerfully*) 'Evening, Miss Holmes (To GERALD) How d'you do? This is Mr Henry Ormonroyd, our photographer

ORMONROYD (*bowing*) Pleased to meet you, I'm sure Delightful weather we're having for the time of year

GERALD Isn't it?

ORMONROYD (*profoundly*) It is

DYSON We seem to have come too early

NANCY I'm afraid you have—

ORMONROYD (*with dignified reproach*) What did I tell you, Fred? Always wanting to rush things We could have had at least a couple more—with my friend at the *Lion* He's a chap who used to have a very good little peppermint-rock business on the Central Pier, Black-

pool at the time I had my studio—there Old times, y'know, Mr —er, and happy days, happy days! (*Hums*)

DYSON (*briskly*) All right, Henry I'm sorry we're early Matter of fact, I don't know yet what this is about I just got a message from the office to come up here and bring a photographer

NANCY You see, it's their Silver Wedding

DYSON Henry, it's Alderman Helliwell's *Silver Wedding*

ORMONROYD Very nice, I suppose

NANCY Yes, but not only my uncle and aunt's There were three couples—my uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Soppitt, Mr and Mrs Parker—

DYSON Is that Councillor Albert Parker?

NANCY (*pulling a little face*) Yes You know him?

DYSON (*gloomily*) Yes, we know him

ORMONROYD Every time he opens his mouth at the Town Hall, he puts his foot in it, so they call him "the foot and mouth disease" Ha Ha Are all three happy couples here?

NANCY Yes, because they were all married on the same morning at the same chapel They have a photograph—a combined wedding group (*She goes to find it—top of piano*)

GERALD You'll have to interview 'em, and they'll tell you how happy they've been—

DYSON Oh—yes I see the idea now

NANCY (*returning with old photograph*) Here you are All six of them on their wedding morning Don't they look absurd in those clothes?

ORMONROYD (*solemnly*) To you—yes To me—no I was married myself about that time (*Holding photograph at arm's length*) Now, you see, Fred, what's wanted is another group in the very same positions After twenty-five years' wear and tear Very nice

DYSON You're holding it upside down

ORMONROYD I know, lad I know, that's the way we always look at 'em professionally Either flies 'ave been at this or somebody's touched up Albert Parker with a screw-driver Well, if we're too early, we're too early Might nip back to the *Lion*, Fred lad, eh?

ORMONROYD *takes camera from top of settee left*

DYSON We'll come back in about an hour

ORMONROYD They're keeping a very nice drop of beer down at the *Lion* now

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

DYSON and ORMONROYD go out, NANCY going towards the door with them, and shutting it behind them GERALD looks at the photograph, then at the back of it, and is obviously interested and amused

GERALD This was when they were all married then—September the fifth, Eighty-Three?

NANCY Yes—why? What's the matter, Gerald? (*He has started laughing*) Gerald, what is it? Oh—don't be so mean They'll be here in a minute

As he shakes his head, still laughing softly, we hear voices behind door into hall

GERALD They're coming in Nancy, let's dodge out that way

Puts photograph on table behind settee right, picks up his straw hat, while she has gone to door into conservatory, and they hurry out that way, shutting door behind them

Voices outside door into hall are louder now, and after a moment the PARKERS, the SOPPITS, the HELLIWELLS enter They are dressed in their best, and obviously crammed with high tea ALBERT PARKER, is a tall, thin, conceited, sententious man, his wife ANNIE, a hopeful kind of woman HERBERT SOPPITT is a smallish neat man, clearly dominated by his wife CLARA, a noisy woman The HELLIWELLS are high-coloured, rather bouncing, rather pompous, very pleased with themselves Their ages are all between forty-five and fifty-five HERBERT SOPPITT and MRS PARKER talk a rather genteel ordinary English, the other four have pronounced north-country accents, with particularly broad "a" sounds

HELLIWELL (*very much the host*) Now what's wanted now's a good cigar, an' I've got the very thing (*Goes to get box from drawer or table*)

MARIA (*indignantly*) That Mrs Northrop! When she's finished her washing-up to-night she goes—and goes for good

CLARA And quite right too! They're all the same Answering back—if you say anything

MARIA Trouble with her is—she likes a drop I've smelt it before to-day.

CLARA sits below sofa left. MARIA to corner ANNIE drops down right to sofa down right

HELLIWELL (*offering cigar-box to PARKER*) Now then, Albert! You'll find that's a good cigar, La Corona

PARKER (*taking one*) Thanks, Joe As you know, I don't smoke a lot, but when I do, I like a good cigar

HELLIWELL (*offering to SOPPITT*) Herbert?

SOPPITT I don't think—er—I will—thanks, Joe

MARIA (*expansively*) Nay, Herbert, 'ave one o' Joe's cigars

CLARA If he'd had it to pay for himself, he'd have been wanting one

SOPPITT (*rather nervously*) I think—I'd rather not smoke just now—I believe I ate too much at tea

ANNIE (*to keep him company*) I know I did

PARKER (*severely*) Yes, an' you'll be complaining before the night's out

CLARA An' so will Herbert

PARKER (*complacently*) Now that's something that never bothers me

HELLIWELL No, we've noticed that, Albert

PARKER (*offended*) How d'you mean?

MARIA Go on, Albert, you know what Joe is—must 'ave his little joke

ANNIE I know I ought to have stopped long before I did—I mean, at tea—but, Maria, everything was *so* nice

CLARA 'Ere, 'ere

MARIA (*complacently accepting this*) Well, I said to Joe "Now, Joe," I said, "we'll only have just the six of us, but we'll make it an occasion an' do it well while we're at it," I said Didn't I, Joe?

HELLIWELL (*busy attending to his cigar, though he does not remove the band*) Did you?

MARIA (*indignantly*) You know very well I did

HELLIWELL (*still not interested*) All right, you did then

MARIA (*same indignant tone*) You know quite well I did, Joe Helliwell

HELLIWELL (*suddenly annoyed himself*) All right, all right, all right, you did then

CLARA (*pats MARIA's hand*) They're all alike Wait till somebody else's with you, and then try to make you out a liar

PARKER (*severely*) Speak for yourself! I don't try to make my wife out a liar, do I, Annie?

ANNIE (*rather timidly, hesitantly*) Well—no—Albert, not—really—

PARKER (*very severely*) How d'you mean—not really—I just don't, that's all (*Changing the subject, in rather lordly style*) A good smoke, Joe, quite a good smoke It reminds me of that cigar Sir

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

Harold Watson gave me not so long since at the club I was standing near the fireplace, and Sir Harold came up——

ANNIE (*gathering courage to interrupt*) Albert—you told them before

PARKER (*glaring*) Well, I can tell 'em again, can't I?

SOPPITT Maria, have you got a copy of that old photograph we had taken? I couldn't find ours

MARIA Yes Where is it, Joe? (*While he looks round*) Aaa, I laugh many a time when I think o' that morning—six of us, all so nervous——

HELLIWELL And the parson worse still He was only like two-pennorth o' copper, an' I could ha' given him a few years myself

CLARA I think we were about first he'd ever married

ANNIE I'm sure we were I didn't feel I'd been married properly——

PARKER (*severely*) Of course you'd been married properly If he'd been ninety and doing it all his life, you wouldn't ha' been married any better, would you?

MARIA I've forgotten his name now He was only a temporary, wasn't he?

SOPPITT I remember! (*A pause*) It was a tree Beech

HELLIWELL That's right—Beech—an' he'd a funny squint (*Has found photograph*) And here's the old photo

Hands it to his wife and the ladies look at it, with exclamations, while the men remain aloof

PARKER (*the business man now*) I see Crossbreds are down again

HELLIWELL (*another business man*) Ay—and they'll stay down with Australian market as it is If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times—if Merinos is down and staying down, then your Crossbreds'll have to follow Now, look at Merinos——

MARIA (*looking up to expostulate*) Here, Joe, we didn't come here to talk about Merinos This isn't Wool Exchange Take a look at yourselves and see what we took on

He ignores her She puts photograph on table back of settee

HELLIWELL Now wait a minute 'Ealths'

MARIA That's right, Joe Ring'

HELLIWELL rings MARIA turns to others

We ought to do it in proper style, an' drink our healths before we go any further

SOPPITT (*attempting a joke*) Further—where?

CLARA (*severely*) That'll do, Herbert A bit o' fun's all right, but you go too far

SOPPITT I didn't mean——

CLARA (*cutting in*) That'll do

MRS NORTHROP *looks in*

MRS NORTHROP (*aggressively*) Well?

MARIA (*rather grandly*) There's a tray with glasses on—just bring it in——

MRS NORTHROP (*indignantly*) What—me? How many pairs of 'ands——

HELLIWELL (*peremptorily*) Now then—just tell thingumptyite—Ruby—to bring in the port wine

MRS NORTHROP What—on top o' your tea? You'll be poorly

She withdraws HELLIWELL *is furious*

HELLIWELL (*angrily*) Now did you 'ear that——

MARIA (*hastily*) All right, Joe, we don't want any trouble She goes to-night, an' she doesn't come back

CLARA I don't know what things are coming to! All the same! Answering back!

PARKER (*sententiously*) They're all alike, that class of people We have the same trouble at mill Don't know when they're well off Idle, that's what they are—bone idle!

CLARA And impudent! Back-answers!

ANNIE (*timidly*) Yes—but I suppose they don't know any better——

PARKER (*severely*) They know a lot better And what you want to stick up for 'em for, I can't think

HELLIWELL (*heartily*) Now then, Albert, don't start fratching, but try an' enjoy yourself for once This is an anniversary Which reminds me, Charlie Pearson told me, t' other day, they built a new Wesleyan Methodist Chapel up at Thornton, and they opened with an anniversary Anyhow, this is ours, so let's have peace an' goodwill all round Now I thought we'd first drink a bit of a toast to ourselves——

MARIA That was *my* idea

HELLIWELL (*ignoring this, but only just*) Then I thought we'd have a bit of a chat about old times, an' then we'd settle down to a game o' Newmarket——

MARIA That was my idea too

HELLIWELL (*annoyed*) What the hangment does it matter whose idea it was, so long as we get on with it and enjoy ourselves!

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

SOPPITT That's the great thing (*Controlled belch Catches his wife's eye and falters*) Enjoy ourselves (*Rises Moves to door Looks miserable and a bit sick*)

CLARA (*severely*) I told you to leave that salmon alone

HELLIWELL Nay, Clara, why can't he have a bit o' salmon if he fancies it?

CLARA (*sharply*) 'Cos it doesn't fancy him, Joe Helliwell, that's why Look at that time we all went to Scarborough!

SOPPITT (*turns*) It was Bridlington

CLARA It was both! And what did that doctor say? *You're digging your grave with your teeth, Mr Soppitt*

HELLIWELL Hahaha!

Enter RUBY, carrying tray with six small glasses on it, and three bottles of port

Here, what did you want to bring 'em all for? One bottle at a time's enough

RUBY (*putting down tray*) Mrs Northrop said you'd better 'ave t'lot while you was at it

HELLIWELL In future, just take your orders from me and not from Mrs Northrop Now just trot along—an' no lip (*Starts to take cork out of bottle*)

RUBY (*turning at door*) Mrs Northrop says she's not coming 'ere again—

HELLIWELL (*heatedly*) We know all about it (*Moves after her, cigar in mouth, bottle in hand*)

MARIA (*cutting in*) Now let it be, Joe

HELLIWELL *stands, draws cork with an effort*

RUBY *has now gone and closed door* HELLIWELL *begins pouring out the port*

D'you know what we ought to do for this? We ought to get just in the same places we were in that old photo Where is it? (*Finds it and directs them from it*) Now here we are (*Uses a sofa*) I was in the middle You were here, Clara You this side, Annie Now come on, Albert—behind Annie Herbert

MARIA *sits last These five have now arranged themselves in grouping of old photograph* HELLIWELL *hands them their glasses of port, then takes up a position himself*

HELLIWELL (*facetiously*) Here's to me and my wife's husband!

MARIA Let's have none o' that silly business, Joe!

PARKER (*solemnly*) A few serious words is what's needed

ANNIE (*rather plaintively*) Oh—must you, Albert?

PARKER How d'you mean—must I? What's wrong with a few serious words on an occasion like this? Marriage—is a serious business

CLARA That's right, Albert Where'd we be without it?

SOPPITT Single

CLARA That'll do, Herbert

PARKER (*sententiously*) Marriage—well—marriage—to begin with, it's an institution, isn't it?

MARIA (*solemnly*) That is so (*Sighs profoundly*)

PARKER (*getting into his stride*) One of the *oldest* institutions It goes back—right back to—well, it goes right back And it's still going strong to-day Why?

HELLIWELL (*hastily*) Well, because——

PARKER (*sharply cutting in*) Let me finish, Joe, let me finish Now why is it still going strong to-day? Because it's the backbone of a decent respectable life

HELLIWELL (*solemnly*) True, Albert, true

PARKER Where would women be without marriage?

CLARA (*sharply*) And where'd some o' you men be?

PARKER All right, I'm coming to that

HELLIWELL Well, don't be too long, Albert I want to try this port

PARKER (*solemnly*) Marriage may be a bit more necessary to women than it is to men——

ANNIE Why?

PARKER (*annoyed at this*) Why?

HELLIWELL Children, you see, Annie

ANNIE (*abashed*) Oh—yes—I'd forgotten Still——

PARKER I'm talking now, *if* you please But if a woman wants a 'ome and security and a respectable life, *which* she gets from marriage, a man wants something to——

CLARA (*quickly*) He wants all he can get

PARKER He wants a nice comfortable 'ome, somebody to tell his troubles to and so forth——

HELLIWELL (*facetiously*) That's good, Albert, the *and so forth*

PARKER Now, Joe——

HELLIWELL Well, cut it short——

PARKER (*slowly and solemnly*) So, as we're all gathered 'ere to celebrate the anniversary of our joint wedding day, friends, I give you—the toast of *Marriage!*

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

MARIA Very nice, Albert

They all drink

ANNIE (*confidentially*) It'll go straight to my head D'you remember that time at Harrogate? I could have sunk through the floor when that waiter laughed

HELLIWELL (*producing bottle again*) Now wait a minute That's all right as far as it goes—but—nay—damn it!—

MARIA (*reproachfully*) Joe!

HELLIWELL We must have another toast, just for ourselves I bet it isn't often there's three couples can meet like this who were all wed on same morning together Now then—

Insists on filling the glasses again as they still hold them in their hands

MARIA (*confidentially*) I don't act silly, but my face gets so red

HELLIWELL Now—here's to all of us—and the Reverend Mr What's his name—Beech—who tied us up—wherever he is—

THE OTHERS Here's to us Here's to him (*Etc*)

They drink When they have finished, front-door bell is heard

MARIA Front door! Who'll that be?

HELLIWELL (*rather importantly*) Well, I told *Yorkshire Argus* to send somebody round to have a word with us

CLARA (*delighted*) What—are you going to have a piece in the papers?

PARKER They don't want to catch us like this.

PARKER swallows rest of his port hastily The others do the same The group breaks up

RUBY looks in

MARIA Is it *Yorkshire Argus*?

RUBY No, it's Mr Forbes, t'organist from t'chapel He came afore, an' then went away again

HELLIWELL Tell him to wait

RUBY goes HELLIWELL turns to the others

You know about this business, Albert You too, Herbert

SOPPITT (*hesitantly*) Yes—but— (*crosses to HELLIWELL*)

HELLIWELL (*sharply*) But, nothing You're too soft, Herbert

CLARA I'm always telling him so

HELLIWELL He's chapel organist—he's paid for t'job—an' either he behaves himself properly or he goes

PARKER (*severely*) He'll go anyhow, if I've my say

ANNIE No, Albert, he's not a bad young fellow——

PARKER Now you shut up, Annie You don't know half of what we know An' I'll bet we don't know half there is to know about that chap Never should ha' been appointed I said so then I say so now I know my own mind

ANNIE (*rebelliously*) I wish sometimes you'd keep a bit of it to yourself

PARKER What's that mean?

NANCY *now appears at door from conservatory*

MARIA Hallo, love, where've you been?

NANCY (*who seems a trifle giggly*) Just out a minute You don't want me, do you, Auntie? Because if you don't, I thought I'd put my hat and coat on and see if Muriel Spencer's in (*Crosses up to door*)

MARIA (*rises*) All right There's that Gerald Forbes waiting outside—your uncle has something to say to him—now don't go talking to him

HELLIWELL I should think not Just say "Hello" or "Good evening" and leave it at that The less you have to do with that chap the better, Nancy

NANCY *suddenly explodes into giggles*

Now what's funny about that?

NANCY (*still giggling*) I'm sorry, Uncle I just remembered—something that amused me——

NANCY *goes out, giggling*

HELLIWELL Now what's got hold of her?

MARIA Oh—she's at silly age They don't know half the time whether to laugh or cry when they're that age Now, Clara—Annie—we'll leave the men to it I expect that's what they want——

PARKER (*solemnly*) Certainly After all, it's chapel business

MARIA Well, we want to go upstairs anyhow!

HELLIWELL That's right

CLARA *glares at him*

MARIA You haven't seen what Joe bought me yet But don't take too long over him

PARKER *Hum!* It wouldn't take *me* long——

HELLIWELL It'll take me less long, 'cos I don't make speeches Here, we'll put these out o' t'way—— (*at sideboard*)

The women go out, and HELLIWELL puts the glasses back on the tray A certain primness now descends on them

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PARKER I said from first—it's a bad appointment To start with, he's too young

SOPPITT (*rather timidly*) I don't think that matters much

PARKER (*severely*) Trouble with you, Herbert, is you don't think anything matters much, and that's just where you're wrong

HELLIWELL Young Forbes is a southerner an' all

PARKER (*with grim triumph*) Ah—I was coming to that

SOPPITT Oughtn't we to have him in?

HELLIWELL No, let him wait a bit

PARKER Do him good No, as soon as they told me he's a southerner and his name's Gerald, I said "We don't want him" I said "La-di-dah That's what you're going to get from him," I said "La di-dah What we want at Lane End—biggest chapel for miles—wi' any amount o' money in congregation—what we want is a bit o' good old Yorkshire organ-playing and choir training," I said "We don't want la-di-dah" (*With awful imitation of ultra-refined accents*) "Heow d'yew dew Sow chawmed to meek your acquaintance Eoh, dee-lateful wethah!" Grr You know what I call that stuff?

SOPPITT (*who has a sense of humour*) Yes (*Broadly*) La-di-dah

HELLIWELL Albert's right We made a mistake Mind you, he'd good qualifications, an' he seemed a nice quiet lad But I must say, after old Sam Fawcett, chapel didn't seem right with an organist who goes round wearing one o' these pink shirts and knitted ties and creases in his trousers——

PARKER It's all——

Here SOPPITT joins in

PARKER and SOPPITT La-di-dah!

PARKER (*in disgusted tone*) Then look at his *Messiah*! We warned him I said to him myself "I know it's a Christmas piece, but you've got to get in quick, afore the others"

HELLIWELL Right, Albert After t'end o' November, there's been so many of 'em you might as well take your *Messiah* an' throw it into t'canal

PARKER And look what happened Hillroad Baptist gave *Messiah*. Salem gave *Messiah* Tong Congregational gave *Messiah* Picklebrook Wesleyans gave *Messiah* And where was Lane End?

SOPPITT Well, when we did get it—it was a good one

HELLIWELL I'm not saying it wasn't, but by that time who cared? But anyhow all that's a detail Point is, we can't have any carrying on, can we?

SOPPITT (*gravely*) Ah—there I agree, Joe

PARKER (*indignantly*) An' I should think so Organist at Lane End Chapel *carrying on!* That sort o' game may do down south, but it won't do up 'ere

HELLIWELL We're all agreed on that

SOPPITT *and* PARKER *nod*

Right then! We'll have 'im in

HELLIWELL *goes to the door, the other two sitting up stiffly and looking official and important*

(*Rather grimly through open door*) All right, come in

GERALD FORBES *follows him in, closing but not latching the door behind him* GERALD *looks cool and self-possessed, with a twinkle in his eye* HELLIWELL *sits down and looks as official and important as the other two* All three *stare severely at GERALD, as he sits down* GERALD *pulls out a cigarette-case, but no sooner has he taken a cigarette from it than ALBERT PARKER remonstrates with him*

PARKER (*severely*) I wouldn't do that

GERALD (*rather startled*) Do what?

PARKER (*severely*) Well, what 'ave you got in your 'and?

GERALD (*still surprised*) This? Cigarette Why?

PARKER Under the circumstances, young man, don't you think it might be better—more—more suitable—more fitting—if you didn't smoke that just now?

The three men look at each other

GERALD (*with a shrug*) Oh—all right, if that's how you feel about it (*Puts case away* *A pause*) Well? You wanted to talk about something, didn't you?

HELLIWELL (*firmly*) We did We do

PARKER And if I'd 'ad my way, we'd have been talking to you long since

GERALD Well, not very long since, because I haven't been up here very long

PARKER No, you haven't been up here very long, and I don't think you'll be up here much longer

HELLIWELL Here, Albert, let *me* get a word in Mr Forbes, you're organist of our Lane End Chapel, and that's the biggest place o' worship round here, and this is a very respectable neighbourhood, with a lot o' money behind it You have a paid appointment as organist and choir-master

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GERALD Yes, though it doesn't keep me, y'know, Mr Helliwell

HELLIWELL No, but because you *are* our organist, you're able to get pupils and various extra jobs, so you don't do so bad out of it, eh?

GERALD (*a trifle dubiously*) No, I'm quite satisfied—for the time being

PARKER (*annoyed*) You're satisfied! For the time being! You're satisfied!

GERALD (*quietly*) That's what I said, Mr Parker

PARKER (*with dignity*) Councillor Parker (*Pointing*) Alderman Helliwell Councillor Parker Mr Soppitt

GERALD (*indicating himself*) Plain mud!

PARKER (*explosively*) Now listen—

HELLIWELL (*cutting in noisily*) Nay, let me finish, Albert We want to keep calm about this—just keep calm

GERALD I'm quite calm

HELLIWELL (*explosively*) You're a damn sight too calm for my liking, young man You ought to be sitting there looking right ashamed of yourself, instead of looking—looking—well, as you do look

GERALD But you haven't told me what's wrong yet

PARKER (*angrily*) Wrong? You're wrong And carrying on's wrong

HELLIWELL (*loftily*) In some chapels they mightn't care what you did—I don't know—but Lane End's got a position to keep up We're respectable folk, and naturally we expect our organist to behave respectably

SOPPITT (*apologetically*) I think you have been very careless, Mr Forbes, and there really has been a lot of grumbling

PARKER For one thing—you've been seen out—late at night—wi' girls

GERALD Girls?

HELLIWELL It may be t'same lass each time, for all I know, but if what I hear is true, whoever she is, she ought to be ashamed of herself My word, if she'd owt to do wi' me, I'd teach her a sharp lesson

PARKER Somebody saw you once gallivanting away late at night, at Morecambe And it gets round, y'know—oh—yes—it gets round

GERALD (*beginning to lose his temper*) Yes, so it seems But I didn't think you'd find it worth while to listen to a lot of silly gossip—

PARKER (*sharply*) Now don't start taking that tone——

GERALD What tone can I take? I say, a lot of silly gossip——

SOPPITT Now, steady, steady

GERALD Silly gossip Old women's twaddle——

HELLIWELL (*heavily*) That'll do Just remember, you're not much more than a lad yet We're nearly twice your age, and we know what's what——

GERALD (*angrily*) Well, what is what then?

HELLIWELL (*angrily*) This is what We're not going to have any more of this Either behave yourself or get back to where you came from You're not going to make us a laughing-stock and a byword in t'neighbourhood Now this is a fair warning——

GERALD (*steadily*) I haven't done anything I'm ashamed of

PARKER What's that prove? If a chap's got cheek of a brass monkey, he never need do aught he's ashamed of

SOPPITT Careful, Albert

PARKER Why should I be careful? I'll tell him to his face what I've said behind his back He never ought to have been appointed, and now he's been carrying on and not caring tuppence what respectable folk might think, he oughtn't to be given any warnings but told to get back to where he came from, and then he can carry on as much as he likes

Both GERALD and HERBERT SOPPITT start to protest, but HELLIWELL loudly stops them

HELLIWELL Now, Albert, we mustn't be too hard We must give young men just another chance (*Severely and patronisingly to GERALD*) I'm not sure I should if this were any other time But nay—damn it this is a festive occasion an' we must take it easy a bit So I'm giving you a last chance to mend yourself And you can think yourself lucky catching me i' this humour Just happens we're all celebrating anniversary of our wedding day—all three of us—ay, we've all been married twenty-five years to-day (*Blows nose*)

GERALD *shakes his head rather sadly*

What're you shaking your head about?

GERALD (*quietly, gently*) Well, you see, Mr Helliwell—I beg your pardon, Alderman Helliwell—I'm rather afraid you haven't been married twenty-five years

HELLIWELL (*roaring*) Do you think we can't count, lad?

GERALD (*same quiet tone*) No, I don't mean that But I'm afraid you've only been living together all this time

HELLIWELL (*jumping up angrily*) *Living together!* I'll knock your

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head right off your shoulders, lad, if you start talking like that to me

GERALD (*also standing up*) No, no, no I'm not trying to insult you I mean what I say

PARKER (*rises, angrily*) Mean what you say! You're wrong in your damned 'ead

SOPPITT (*authoritatively, for him*) Wait a minute—Albert, Joe We must listen He means it

HELLIWELL (*angrily*) Means it! Means what?

GERALD (*impressively*) If you'll just be quiet a minute I'll explain

PARKER (*explosively*) I don't want to——

GERALD (*sharply*) I said—*quiet*

HELLIWELL Leave him be, Albert

GERALD (*sits*) Thanks Mind if I smoke now?

All sit With maddening slowness, GERALD takes out and lights cigarette HELLIWELL and ALBERT PARKER watch him with impatience and look as if about to explode

I went to North Wales for my holiday this summer——

HELLIWELL (*impatiently*) Is this part of it, 'cos I don't care *where* you went for your holidays!

GERALD (*calmly*) I went to North Wales, and only came back about a fortnight ago While I was there I made the acquaintance of a parson, who'd been in Africa for the last twenty years When he learnt that I was the organist of Lane End Chapel, Cleckleywyke, he became very excited, and then it turned out that he'd been at Lane End himself for a short time About twenty-five years ago

SOPPITT What was his name

GERALD Beech Francis Edwin Beech

HELLIWELL (*boisterously*) Oh—yes—Beech! We were only talking about him to-night We remember Mr Beech He married us, y'know Yes, he married us, five-and-twenty years ago—all three couples That's what we're celebrating——

His voice suddenly dies away because he realises what the other two have realised for the last minute, that there might be something wrong So as he mutters the end of his sentence now, he glances unhappily at the others

Y'know—being—married—twenty-five years——

GERALD *looks at them over his cigarette*

PARKER (*swallowing*) Go on Go on

GERALD I could see that something he remembered about Cleckleywyke and Lane End worried him (*With obvious relish*) You might

say, gentlemen, it was *preying* on his mind, it was *gnawing* at his conscience, it was *haunting* him, it was——

HALLIWELL (*angrily*) What is this—a recitation?

GERALD I must apologise if I'm boring you, gentlemen——

PARKER (*in sudden passion, jumps up*) La-di-dah! La-di-dah!
(*As GERALD stares at him in astonishment*) Now if you've anything to tell us, for God's sake tell us—and don't la-di-dah!

HELLIWELL Quite right, Albert (*To GERALD, impatiently*) Well, what did Mr Beech say?

GERALD He didn't say anything

HELLIWELL *and PARKER are at once relieved and annoyed They breathe more freely, but then feel they have been needlessly alarmed* HERBERT SOPPITT *wants to learn more and looks steadily at GERALD*

HELLIWELL Well, what are you nattering on about him for——?

SOPPITT Just a minute, Joe (*To GERALD*) That's not all, is it?

GERALD All? I should think not! Only you won't give me a chance I said he didn't say anything, but he wrote something The letter only came two days ago I have it here (*Produces one rather small sheet of notepaper, written on both sides He now reads it impressively*) From the Reverend Francis Edwin Beech "Dear Mr Forbes, Before returning to Africa I feel I owe it both to you and to myself to explain what you must have found puzzling in my many references to Cleckleywyke and Lane End Chapel Although I was only temporarily at Lane End, I could not forget it for there I was guilty of the most culpable negligence"

The three men look at each other

"I went to Cleckleywyke straight from college, and during those first few months I did not realise that there were various forms I ought to have signed, and had witnessed by church officers, so that one may be recorded as an authorised person to perform the ceremony of marriage——"

HELLIWELL (*rises, shouting*) What? (*Grabs the letter from GERALD, stares at it, then reads himself, slowly*) "the ceremony of marriage The result was, I was not then an authorised person Fortunately during that short period I was only called upon twice to marry people, but the first time there were no less than three hopeful young couples who imagined—poor souls—that I was joining them in holy wedlock—when—I—was completely—unauthorised—to—do—so——"

PARKER (*yelling and snatching the letter*) Let's have a look (*He looks and HERBERT SOPPITT joins him*) It's signed all right too—Francis Edwin Beech

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GERALD And if you compare that signature with the one in the chapel register, you'll see it's the same man No deception

HELLIWELL (*dazed and bitter*) Why—the bloody donkey!

HELLIWELL, PARKER and SOPPITT *look at each other in silent consternation*

SOPPITT (*slowly, thoughtfully*) Why, if we've never been married at all, then——

HELLIWELL Don't start working it out in detail, Herbert, 'cos it gets very ugly—very ugly There's that lad o' yours at grammar school, for instance—I wouldn't like to have to give him a name now——

SOPPITT (*indignantly*) Here, steady, Joe——

HELLIWELL Well, you see, it gets very ugly Keep your mind off t'details

PARKER (*bitterly*) Silver wedding!

HELLIWELL Now don't you start neither, Albert

PARKER (*solemnly*) Joe, Herbert, when them three poor women upstairs gets to know what they really are——

HELLIWELL (*grimly*) Then t'balloon goes up properly Talk about a rumpus You'll 'ear 'em from 'ere to Leeds

PARKER (*gravely*) Joe, Herbert, they mustn't know Nobody must know Why—we'd be laughed right out o' town What—Alderman Helliwell—Councillor Albert Parker—Herbert Soppitt—all big men at chapel too! I tell you, if this leaks out—we're done!

HELLIWELL We are, Albert

SOPPITT (*horrified*) If once it got into the papers!

HELLIWELL (*even more horrified*) *Papers!* Oh—Christmas!—it's got to be kept from t'papers

GERALD, *who has been leaving them to themselves to digest this news, now turns to them again*

GERALD (*holding out his hand*) You'd better give me that letter, hadn't you?

PARKER and HELLIWELL (*rising*) Oh no!

They stand together as if protecting it

PARKER (*holding it out*) This letter——

HELLIWELL (*snatching it*) Here——

PARKER (*angrily*) Nay, Joe—give it back——

HELLIWELL I'm sorry, Albert, but I don't trust nobody wi' this letter but meself Why—it's—it's dynamite!

GERALD Yes, but it's addressed to me, and so it happens to be my property, you know

SOPPITT I'm afraid he's right there!

HELLIWELL (*turning on him, annoyed*) You would have to put that in, wouldn't you? Dang me, you're in this mess just as we are, aren't you?

PARKER (*severely*) Anyhow, we've a position to keep up even if you haven't, Herbert

SOPPITT (*apologetically*) I was only saying he's right when he says it's his property We had a case——

HELLIWELL (*aggressively*) Never mind about that case Think about this case It's a whole truck-load o' cases, this is

GERALD My letter, please

HELLIWELL (*ingratiatingly*) Now listen, lad I know you only want to do what's right And we happened to be a bit 'asty with you, when you first came in We didn't mean it Just—a way o' talking When Herbert Soppitt there gets started——

SOPPITT (*indignantly*) What—me!

PARKER (*severely*) You were 'asty, y'know, Herbert, you can't deny it (*To GERALD*) Mind you, I'll say now to your face what I've often said behind your back You gave us best *Messiah* and best *Elijah* we've ever had at Lane End

HELLIWELL Easy, easy! Best i' Cleckleywyke! And why? I've told 'em when they've asked me "That young feller of ours is clever," I said "I knew he had it in him," I said

SOPPITT (*hopefully*) Yes, you did, Joe (*To GERALD*) And so did I I've always been on your side

GERALD I believe you have, Mr Soppitt (*To all three of them*) You can keep that letter to-night—on one condition That Mr Soppitt has it

SOPPITT (*eagerly, holding out his hand*) Thank you, Joe

HELLIWELL (*uneasily*) What's the idea o' this?

GERALD That happens to be the way I feel about it Now either give it back to me at once—or hand it over to Mr Soppitt, who'll be answerable to me for it

SOPPITT (*eagerly*) Certainly, certainly

HELLIWELL *silently and grudgingly hands it over* SOPPITT *puts it carefully in his inside pocket* *The others watch him like hawks*
There is a pause, then we hear a knocking from upstairs

HELLIWELL Knocking

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PARKER (*grimly*) I 'eard

HELLIWELL That means she's getting impatient

PARKER I expect Clara's been ready to come down for some time

HELLIWELL (*bitterly*) They want to get on with the celebration

PARKER (*bitterly*) Chat about old times

HELLIWELL (*bitterly*) Nice game o' cards

GERALD (*after a pause*) I'd better be going

HELLIWELL (*hastily*) No, no No Take it easy

PARKER No 'urry, no 'urry at all I expect Joe has a nice cigar for you somewhere

HELLIWELL (*with forced joviality*) Certainly I have And a drink of anything you fancy—

GERALD No, thanks And I must be going

HELLIWELL Now listen, lad We've admitted we were 'asty with you, so just forget about it, will you? Now you see the mess we're in, through no fault of ours— (*Goes up to get cigars*)

GERALD I do And it *is* a mess, isn't it? Especially when you begin to think—

PARKER (*hastily*) Yes, quite so, but don't you bother thinking Just— (*rather desperately*) try an' forget you ever saw that letter

HELLIWELL (*who now comes with the cigars*) We're all friends, the best of friends Now you've got to have a cigar or two, lad—I insist— (*he sticks several cigars into GERALD's outside pocket, as he talks*) and you're going to promise us—on your word of honour—not to tell anybody anything about this nasty business, aren't you?

All three look at him anxiously He keeps them waiting a moment or two

GERALD All right

They breathe again HELLIWELL shakes his hand

HELLIWELL And you won't regret it, lad

The knocking from upstairs is heard again

PARKER (*miserably*) 'Ear that?

HELLIWELL It's wife again

SOPPITT (*thoughtfully*) Curious thing about wives They're always telling you what poor company you are for them, yet they're always wanting to get back to you

HELLIWELL (*darkly*) That isn't 'cos they enjoy your company It's so they can see what you're doing

PARKER Well, what are we doing?

HELLIWELL (*sharply now*) Wasting time (*To them*) Now listen, chaps, we're in no proper shape yet to face t'wives They'd have it all out of us in ten minutes, and then fat'll be in t'fire

PARKER I know We've got to put our thinking caps on

SOPPITT I suppose Mr Beech couldn't have been mistaken, could he?

PARKER We might take that letter and get expert advice——

HELLIWELL (*hastily*) What! An' 'ave it all over the town?

PARKER (*quickly*) We might put a case—without mentioning names——

HALLIWELL (*with decision*) I know what we'll do We'll nip down to t'club, 'cos we can talk it over there in peace an' quiet Come on, chaps Just as we are, straight down t'club (*To GERALD*) Now, young man, you promised You won't go back on your word?

GERALD No You're safe with me

HELLIWELL (*urgently*) Good lad! Now, wait till we've got off, then go out front way Come on, Albert, Herbert, we've no time to lose an' we go this way—— (*bustling them towards exit through conservatory*) straight to t'club

They go out GERALD looks at his watch, smiles, lights a cigarette, then makes for door, which has never been quite closed When he opens it suddenly, MRS NORTHROP, still holding a towel and a large glass dish, which she is wiping perfunctorily, is discovered just behind door She is in high glee and not at all abashed at being found there

GERALD (*with mock sternness*) Have you been listening?

MRS NORTHROP (*who may have had a drink or two*) Listening! I should think I have been listening! I wouldn't have missed this lot even if it means 'aving earache for a week None of 'em rightly married at all! Not one of 'em properly tied up! (*She begins laughing quite suddenly, and then goes off into peals of laughter, rolling against the door The dish she holds seems to be in danger*)

GERALD (*amused as he goes past her, out*) Look out—or you may break that dish

MRS NORTHROP (*calling to him*) Brek a dish! If I want to, I'll brek a dozen now

GERALD (*just off, challengingly*) Not you! I dare you!

MRS NORTHROP (*coolly*) Well, here's a start, any road (*Tosses the dish down and it smashes noisily in hall*)

We hear GERALD give a laughing shout, then bang the front door

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MRS NORTHROP *now starts laughing helplessly again, still leaning against the door*

MRS NORTHROP Nay—dammit!—— (*laughing*) Oh dear—oh dear—oh dear——

She is still roaring with laughter as the curtain briskly descends

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

About half an hour later The lights are on MARIA is drawing curtains, ANNIE and CLARA are laying out the cards and counters for New-market on a card-table, and they continue doing this throughout the scene that follows, chiefly counting the coloured counters and putting them into piles

CLARA (*with much discontent*) Well, I must say—this is a queer way o' going on

MARIA They'll have just gone outside to finish their smokes

CLARA (*grimly*) When Herbert takes me out to enjoy myself, I don't expect him to be outside finishing any smokes

ANNIE (*at table*) Perhaps they'd something they wanted to talk over

CLARA Well they can talk it over here, can't they?

RUBY *enters from conservatory*

MARIA Well, Ruby, are they out there?

RUBY No, they aren't

MARIA (*sharply*) Have you looked properly?

RUBY Well I couldn't miss three grown men in a garden that size

MARIA Did you look up and down the road like I told you?

RUBY Yes, but they aren't there

The three wives look at each other, puzzled

CLARA Didn't you hear them go?

RUBY No I was back in t'kitchen all time, doing t'washing up
That Mrs Northrop left me to it

MARIA Where was she then?

RUBY Out 'ere somewhere, I fancy I know she's gone like a dafthead, ever since she come back Laughin' to herself—like a proper barmpot

MARIA Well, ask Mrs Northrop if she knows where they went

RUBY *goes*

That noise you heard upstairs was a bit o' this Mrs Northrop's work—one o' my best dishes gone An' Ruby says she just laughed

CLARA Stop it out of her wages and see if she can get a good laugh out o' that I've no patience with 'em

ANNIE I thought she didn't look a nice woman

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One o' them idle drinking pieces o' nothing from back o'

Well, I was in a hurry and had to have somebody But
—for good—to-night

RUBY *appears*

Mrs Northrop says they wanted to have a nice quiet talk,
went down to their club

RUBY *disappears*

(*angrily*) Club! Club!

And to-night of all nights—I do think it's a shame

(*indignantly*) I never 'eard o' such a thing in me life

(*furiously*) Club! I'll club him

Nay, I don't know what's come over 'em

(*angrily*) I know what'll come over one of 'em

Perhaps there's something up

Something down, you mean—ale, stout, an' whisky
round! Money no object!

They're 'ere

*The three of them immediately sit bolt upright and look very
'osty The men file in from the conservatory, looking very*

WELL (*nervously*) Ay—well——

(*grimly*) Well what?

LIWELL Well—nowt—really

(*nervously*) We didn't—er—think you'd be down yet
Joe? Did we, Albert?

LIWELL No, we didn't, Herbert

That's right, we didn't

RA (*cuttingly*) Herbert Soppitt, you must be wrong in your
Club!

And to-night of all nights!

LIWELL Well, you see, we thought we'd just nip down for a
nutes while you were talking upstairs

What for?

Oh—just to talk over one or two things

What things?

CLARA You'll get no Newmarket out o' me to-night

ANNIE You're—you're—selfish

CLARA Have you just found that out? Never think about anything but their own comfort and convenience

MARIA I'm surprised at you, Joe Helliwell—and after I'd planned to make everything so nice

CLARA Lot o' thanks you get from them! Club! (*Looking hard at SOPPITT*) Well, go on—say something

The men look at each other uneasily Then the women look indignantly

ANNIE Just think what day it is!

CLARA And after giving you best years of our life—without a word o' thanks

MARIA An' just remember, Joe Helliwell, there were plenty of other fellows I could have had besides you

ANNIE You seem to think—once you've married us you can take us for granted

PARKER (*uneasily*) Nay, I don't

CLARA (*very sharply*) Yes, you do—all alike!

MARIA If some of you woke up to-morrow to find you weren't married to us, you'd be in for a few big surprises

HELLIWELL (*uneasily*) Yes—I dare say—you're right

MARIA (*staring at him*) Joe Helliwell, what's matter with you to-night?

HELLIWELL (*uneasily*) Nowt—nowt's wrong wi' me, love

CLARA (*looking hard at SOPPITT*) You'll hear more about this when I get you 'ome

SOPPITT (*mildly*) Yes, Clara

The women look at the men again, then at each other Now they turn away from the men, ignoring them

MARIA What were you saying about your cousin, Clara?

CLARA (*ignoring the men*) Oh—well, the doctor said “You're all acid, Mrs Foster, that's your trouble You're making acid as fast as you can go”

ANNIE Oh—poor thing!

CLARA Yes, but it didn't surprise me, way she'd eat I once saw her eat nine oyster patties, finishing 'em up after their Ethel got married I said “Nay, Edith, have a bit o' mercy on your inside,” but of course she just laughed

The men have been cautiously moving to the back towards the

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door As HELLIWELL has his hand on the handle, MARIA turns on him

MARIA And where're you going now?

HELLIWELL (*uneasily*) Into t'dining-room

MARIA What for?

HELLIWELL Well—because—well—— (*Gathers boldness*) We've summat to talk over Albert, 'Erbert, quick!

They file out smartly, without looking behind them The women stare at them in amazement The door shuts The women look at each other

MARIA Now what's come over 'em?

ANNIE There's something up

CLARA What can be up? They're just acting stupid, that's all But wait till I get his lordship 'ome

ANNIE Suppose we went home now——

CLARA No fear! That's just what they'd like Back to t'club!

MARIA I'd go up to bed now and lock me door, if I didn't think I'd be missing something

ANNIE It's a pity we can't go off just by ourselves—for a day or two

CLARA And what sort o' game are they going to get up to while we're gone? But I've a good mind to go in and tell mine "Look, I've been married to you for five-and-twenty years and it's about time I had a rest"

MARIA And for two pins I'll say to Joe "If you got down on your bended knees and begged me to, I wouldn't stay married to you if I didn't have to"

Door opens slowly, and MRS NORTHROP comes just inside, carrying large string bag, with clothes, two stout bottles in, etc She is dressed to go home now

MRS NORTHROP I've done

MARIA (*suspiciously*) It hasn't taken you very long

MRS NORTHROP (*modestly*) No—but then I'm a rare worker Many a one's said to me "Mrs Northrop, I can't believe you've just that pair of 'ands—you're a wonder"

MARIA (*acidly*) Well, I don't think I want a wonder here, Mrs Northrop I'll pay you what I owe you to-night, and then you needn't come again

MRS NORTHROP (*bridling*) Ho, I see—that's it, is it?

MARIA Yes, it is I don't consider you satisfactory

CLARA I should think not!

MRS NORTHROP (*amused*) Who's asking you to pass remarks?
(*To MARIA*) And don't think I want to come 'ere again Me 'usband
wouldn't let me, anyhow, when he 'ears what I 'ave to tell him We've
always kept ourselves respectable

MARIA And what does that mean?

CLARA Don't encourage her impudence

MRS NORTHROP An' *you* mind your own interference (*To*
MARIA) I was beginnin' to feel sorry for you—but now——

MARIA (*coldly*) I don't know what you're talking about

CLARA What's she got in that bag?

MRS NORTHROP (*angrily*) I've got me old boots an' apron an'
cleanin' stuff in this bag——

MARIA I can see two bottles there——

MRS NORTHROP (*angrily*) Well, what if you can? D'you think
you're the only folk i' Cleckleywyke who can buy summat to sup?
If you must know, these is two stout empties I'm taking away 'cos
they belong to me—bought an' paid for by me at Jackson's off-
licence an' if you don't believe me go an' ask 'em

MARIA (*stopping CLARA from bursting in*) No, Clara, let her alone
—we've had enough (*To MRS NORTHROP, rather haughtily*) It's
twenty-four shillings altogether, isn't it?

MRS NORTHROP (*aggressively*) No, it isn't It's twenty-five and
six—if I never speak another word

MARIA (*going for her purse on side-table*) All right then, twenty-
five and six, but I'm going to take something off for that dish you
broke——

MRS NORTHROP (*angrily*) You won't take a damned ha'penny off!

CLARA Language now as well as back-answers!

MARIA (*giving MRS NORTHROP a sovereign*) Here's a pound and
that's all you'll get

MRS NORTHROP (*angrily*) I won't 'ave it I won't 'ave it

MARIA (*leaving it on nearest table to MRS NORTHROP*) There it
is, Mrs Northrop, and it's all you'll get (*Sitting down in stately*
fashion and turning to CLARA) Let's see, Clara, what were you saying?
(*All three women now ignore MRS NORTHROP, which makes her angrier*
than ever)

MRS NORTHROP (*drowning any possible conversation*) An' don't sit
there tryin' to look like duchesses, 'cos I've lved round 'ere too long
an' I know too much about yer Tryin' to swank! Why—— (*pointing*
to MARIA) I remember you when you were Maria Fawcett an' you

were nobbut a burler and mender at Barkinson's afore you took up wi' Joe Helliwell an' he were nōbbut a woollsorter i' them days And as for you— (*pointing to CLARA*) I remember time when you were weighin' out apples an' potatoes in your father's greengrocer's shop, corner o' Park Road, an' a mucky little shop it wor an' all—

MARIA (*rising, angrily*) I'll fetch my husband

MRS NORTHROP He isn't your husband I was goin' to say I'm as good as you, but fact is I'm a damn sight better, 'cos I'm a respectable married woman an' that's more than any o' you can say—

CLARA (*angrily*) Get a policeman

MRS NORTHROP (*derisively*) Get a policeman! Get a dozen, an' they'll all 'ave a good laugh when they 'ear what I 'ave to tell 'em Not one o' you properly married at all I 'eard that organist o' yours tellin' your 'usbands—if I can call 'em your 'usbands I wor just be'ind t'door—an' this lot wor too good to miss—better than a turn at t'Empire

CLARA (*angrily*) I don't believe a word of it

MRS NORTHROP Please yourself But 'e give 'em a letter, an' that's why they went down to t'club to talk it over—an' I can't say I blame 'em 'cos they've plenty to talk over An' by gow, so 'ave you three It's about time yei thought o' getting wed, isn't it?

They stare in silence She gives them a triumphant look, then picks up her sovereign

And now you owe me another five an' six at least—an' if you've any sense you'll see I get it—but I can't stop no longer 'cos I've said I meet me 'usband down at 'Are an' 'Ounds, 'cos they're 'aving a draw for a goose for Cleckleywyke Tide an' we've three tickets—so I'll say good night

She bangs the door The three women stare at each other in consternation

MARIA That's why they were so queer I knew there was something

CLARA (*bitterly*) The daft blockheads!

ANNIE *suddenly begins laughing*

CLARA Oh—for goodness' sake, Annie Parker!

ANNIE (*still laughing*) I'm not Annie Parker And it all sounds so silly

MARIA (*indignantly*) Silly! What's silly about it?

CLARA (*bitterly*) Serves me right for ever bothering with anybody so gormless Isn't this Herbert Soppitt all over! Couldn't even get us married right!

MARIA (*looking distressed*) But—Clara, Annie—this is *awful!*
What are we going to do?

CLARA I know what we're *not* going to do—and that's play *New-market* (*Begins putting things away, helped by other two*)

ANNIE Eee—we'll look awfully silly lining up at Lane End Chapel again to get married, won't we?

CLARA (*angrily*) Oh—for goodness' sake——!

MARIA (*bitterly*) Better tell them three daffheads in t'dining-room to come in now

CLARA No, just a minute

MARIA What for?

CLARA 'Cos I want to think, an' very sight of Herbert'll make me that mad I won't be able to think (*Ponders a moment*) Now if nobody knew but us, it wouldn't matter so much

MARIA But that fool of a parson knows——

CLARA And the organist knows——

ANNIE And your Mrs Northrop knows—don't forget that—and you wouldn't pay her that five-and-six——

MARIA Here, one o' them men must fetch her back

CLARA I should think so Why, if people get to know about this—we're—we're——

RUBY (*looking in, announcing loudly*) *Yorkshire Argus*

CLARA (*in a panic*) We don't want any *Yorkshire Argus* here—or God knows where we'll be——

She is interrupted by the entrance of FRED DYSON, who has had some drinks and is pleased with himself

DYSON (*very heartily*) Well, here we are again At least I am Fred Dyson—*Yorkshire Argus* Mrs Helliwell?

MARIA (*rather faintly*) Yes

DYSON (*same tone*) And Mrs Albert Parker and Mrs Soppitt—three lucky ladies, eh?

They are looking anything but fortunate

DYSON Now, you'd never guess my trouble

ANNIE (*who can't resist it*) You'd never guess ours, either

MARIA (*hastily*) Shut up, Annie What were you saying, Mr Dyson?

DYSON I've gone and lost our photographer—Henry Ormonroyd Brought him with me here earlier on, then we went back to the *Lion*, where he'd met an old pal I left 'em singing *Larboard Watch* in the tap-room, not twenty minutes since, went into the private bar five

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minutes afterwards, couldn't find old Henry anywhere, so thought he must have come up here By the way, where's the party?

ANNIE This is it

MARIA (*hastily*) Shut up, Annie (*Rather desperately, to DYSON*) You see, my husband—Alderman Helliwell—you know him of course?

DYSON (*heartily*) Certainly He's quite a public figure, these days That's why the *Argus* sent me up here to-night—when he told 'em you were all celebrating your silver wedding—

CLARA (*unpleasantly*) Oh—he suggested your coming here, did he?

DYSON He did

CLARA (*unpleasantly*) He would!

MARIA Well, he didn't know then—what—I mean—(*her voice alters and dies away*)

DYSON Our readers 'ud like to know all about this affair

CLARA (*grimly*) An' I'll bet they would!

MARIA Now 'ave a bit o' sense, Clara—

CLARA (*quickly*) Why, you nearly gave it away—

ANNIE (*coming in*) What on earth are you saying, you two? (*Smiles at DYSON, who is looking rather mystified*) It's all right, Mr Dyson What Mrs Helliwell was going to say was that there was only just us six, y'know It wasn't a real party Just a little—er—private—er—sort of—you know

DYSON (*looking about him, thirstily*) I know Just a cosy little do—with—er—a few drinks

MARIA That's it

DYSON A few drinks—and—er—cigars—and—er—so on

But they do not take the hint, so now he pulls out pencil and bit of paper

Now, Mrs Helliwell, wouldn't you like to tell our readers just what your feelings are now that you're celebrating twenty-five years of happy marriage?

MARIA (*her face working*) I—er—I—er—

DYSON You needn't be shy, Mrs Helliwell Now, come on

To his astonishment, MARIA suddenly bursts into tears, and then hurries out of the room

CLARA (*reproachfully*) Now, look what you've done, young man

DYSON (*astonished*) Nay, dash it—what have I done? I only asked her—

ANNIE (*hastily*) She's a bit upset to-night—you know, what with

all the excitement It's no use your staying now—you'd better go and find your photographer

CLARA (*angrily*) Now, Annie, for goodness' sake! We want no photographers here

ANNIE (*to DYSON*) That's all right She's upset too Now you just pop off

ANNIE *almost marches DYSON to the door and sees him through it We hear him go out CLARA sits breathing very hard ANNIE returns, leaving door open behind her*

ANNIE Well, we're rid of him

CLARA For how long?

ANNIE (*annoyed*) You can't sit there, Clara, just saying "For how long?" as if you're paying me to manage this business If we want it kept quiet, we'll have to stir ourselves and not sit about shouting and nearly giving it all away as you and Maria did when that chap was here

CLARA (*bitterly*) If we hadn't said we'd marry a set o' numskulls, this would never 'ave happened If my poor mother was alive to see this day——

MARIA *returns, blowing her nose and sits down miserably*

MARIA (*unhappily*) I'm sorry—Clara, Annie—but I just couldn't help it When he asked me that question, something turned right over inside—an' next minute I was crying

CLARA (*severely*) Well, crying's not going to get us out of this mess

ANNIE (*sharply*) You're never satisfied, Clara First you go on at me for laughing and now you blame poor Maria for crying——

CLARA (*loudly, sharply*) Well, what do you want to go laughing an' crying for? What do you think this is? *Uncle Tom's Cabin?*

MARIA They're coming in

The women sit back, grimly waiting HELLIWELL, PARKER, SOPPITT enter, and the women look at them

PARKER (*uneasily*) Who was that?

No reply He exchanges a glance with SOPPITT and HELLIWELL
I said, who was it came just then?

CLARA (*suddenly, fiercely*) *Yorkshire Argus!*

PARKER (*resigned tone*) They know

ANNIE (*sharply*) Course we know

HELLIWELL looks at them, then makes for the door again

MARIA And where are you going?

HELLIWELL To fetch t'whisky

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MARIA And is whisky going to 'elp us?

HELLIWELL I don't know about you, but it'll help me (*Goes out*)

MARIA (*hopefully*) It's not all a tale, is it?

PARKER No, it's right enough We put case to a chap at club—no names, of course—and he said it 'ad 'appened a few times—when a young parson thought he was qualified to marry folk—an' it turned out he wasn't But of course it 'asn't happened often

CLARA No, but it has to 'appen to *us* (*Fiercely to SOPPITT*) I blame you for this

SOPPITT (*unhappily to PARKER*) Didn't I tell you she would?

CLARA (*sharply*) *She!* Who's *she*? The cat? Just remember you're talking about your own wife

PARKER Ah—but you see, he isn't—not now

CLARA (*angrily*) Now, stop that, Albert Parker

HELLIWELL *returns with large tray, with whisky, soda and glasses*

HELLIWELL Any lady like a drop?

MARIA State I'm in now, it 'ud choke me

The other women shake their heads scornfully

HELLIWELL Albert?

PARKER Thanks, I think I will, Joe (*Goes to him*)

HELLIWELL (*busy with drinks*) 'Erbert?

CLARA (*quickly*) He mustn't 'ave any

HELLIWELL 'Erbert?

CLARA (*confidently*) You 'eard what I said, Herbert You're not to 'ave any

SOPPITT (*the rebel now*) Thanks, Joe, just a drop

He goes up, looks at his wife as he takes his glass and drinks, then comes away, still looking at her, while she glares at him

HELLIWELL 'Ere, but I'd never ha' thought young Forbes ud' have gone back on his word like that, when he promised solemnly not to tell another soul

MARIA But he didn't tell us

HELLIWELL (*staggered*) Eh? (*Exchanges alarmed glance with other men*) Who did then?

MARIA Charwoman—Mrs Northrop She 'eard you, behind that door

HELLIWELL (*alarmed*) 'Ere, where is she?

MARIA Gone

ANNIE (*with some malice*) Maria's just given her the push

PARKER (*angrily*) If she's gone off with this news you just might as well play it on Town Hall chimes

HELLIWELL (*angrily*) Why didn't you say so at first? If this woman gets round wi' this tale about us, we'll never live it down Did she go 'ome?

ANNIE No, to the *Hare and Hounds*

HELLIWELL (*masterfully*) Herbert, swallow that whisky quick—an' nip down to t'*Hare an' Hounds* as fast as you can go, an' bring her back——

SOPPITT But I don't know her

HELLIWELL Nay, damn it, you saw her in here, not an hour since——

SOPPITT An' she doesn't know me

HELLIWELL Now, don't make difficulties, Herbert Off you go (*Moves him towards conservatory*) And bring her back as fast as you can and promise her owt she asks so long as you get back (*He is now outside, shouting*) An' make haste We're depending on you

HELLIWELL *returns, blowing, carrying SOPPITT'S glass He is about to drink out of this when he remembers, so takes and drinks from his own, then breathes noisily and mops his brow They are all quiet for a moment*

You know, Albert lad, it feels quite peculiar to me

PARKER What does?

HELLIWELL This—not being married

MARIA (*rising, solemn*) Joe Helliwell, 'ow can you stand there an' say a thing like that?

CLARA } He ought to be ashamed of himself

ANNIE } I'm surprised at you, Joe

HELLIWELL (*bewildered*) What—what are you talking about?

MARIA (*solemnly*) After twenty-five years together Haven't I been a good wife to you, Joe Helliwell?

HELLIWELL Well, I'm not complaining, am I?

PARKER (*tactlessly*) You've been the *same* as a good wife to him, Maria

MARIA (*furiously*) The *same*! I haven't been the same as a good wife, I've been a good wife, let me tell you, Albert Parker

ANNIE } Nay, Albert!

CLARA } (*angrily to PARKER*) I never 'eard such silly talk

PARKER (*aggressively*) Oh—an' what's silly about it, eh?

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CLARA Everything

HELLIWELL (*tactlessly*) Nay, but when you come to think of it—Albert's right

PARKER (*solemn and fatuous*) We must face facts Now, Maria, you might *feel* married to him——

MARIA (*scornfully*) *I might feel married to him!* If you'd had twenty-five years of him, you wouldn't talk about *might* Haven't I——

HELLIWELL (*cutting in noisily*) 'Ere, steady on, steady on—with your *twenty-five years of 'im* Talking about me as if I were a dose o' typhoid fever

MARIA (*loudly*) I'm not, Joe All I'm saying is——

PARKER (*still louder*) Now let me finish what I started to say I said—you might *feel* married to him—but strictly speaking—and in the eyes of the law—the fact is, you're *not* married to him We're none of us married

CLARA (*bitterly*) Some o' t'neighbours ha' missed it, couldn't you shout it louder?

PARKER I wasn't that loud

HELLIWELL (*reproachfully*) You were bawling your 'ead off

ANNIE Yes, you were

MARIA (*reproachfully*) You don't know who's listening I'm surprised you haven't more sense, Albert

PARKER (*irritably*) All right, all right, all right But we shan't get anywhere till we face facts It's not our fault, but our misfortune

MARIA I don't know so much about that either

HELLIWELL Oh? (*To ALBERT*) Goin' to blame us now

MARIA Well, an' why not?

HELLIWELL (*irritably*) Nay, damn it—it wasn't *our* fault

MARIA If a chap asks me to marry him and then he takes me to chapel and puts me in front of a parson, I expect parson to be a real one an' not just somebody dressed up

HELLIWELL Well, don't I?

MARIA You should ha' found out

HELLIWELL Talk sense! 'Ow could I know he wasn't properly qualified?

MARIA (*sneering*) Well, it's funny it's got to 'appen to us, isn't it?

PARKER But that's what I say—it's not our fault, it's our misfortune It's no use blaming anybody Just couldn't be 'elped But fact remains—we're——

CLARA (*interrupting angrily*) If you say it again, Albert Parker, I'll throw something at yer You needn't go on and on about it

MARIA (*bitterly*) Mostly at top o' your voice

PARKER (*with air of wounded dignity*) Say no more I've finished
(*Turns his back on them*)

All three women look at him disgustedly MARIA now turns to JOE

MARIA But, Joe, you're not going to tell me you feel different—just because of this—this accident?

JOE (*solemnly*) I won't tell you a lie, love I can't help it, but ever since I've known I'm not married I've felt *most peculiar*

MARIA (*rising, sudden temper*) Oo, I could knock your fat head off

MARIA goes hurriedly to the door, making sobbing noises on the way, and hurries out

ANNIE (*following her*) Oh—poor Maria!

ANNIE goes out, closing door

CLARA Well, I 'ope you're pleased with yourself now

HELLIWELL (*sententiously*) Never interfere between 'usband and wife

CLARA You just said you weren't 'usband an' wife

HELLIWELL (*angrily*) 'Ere, if I'm going to argue with a woman it might as well be the one I live with

HELLIWELL hurries out A silence PARKER remains sulky and detached

CLARA (*after pause*) Well, after all these ructions, another glass o' port wouldn't do me any 'arm (*Waits, then as there is no move from PARKER*) Thank you very much (*Rises, with dignity, to help herself*) Nice manners we're being shown, I must say (*Fills her glass*) I said *nice manners*, Councillor Albert Parker!

PARKER (*turning, angrily*) Now if I were poor Herbert Soppitt, I'd think twice before I asked you to marry me again

CLARA (*just going to drink*) *Ask me agam!* There'll be no asking Herbert Soppitt's my husband—an' he stays my husband

PARKER In the eyes of the law—

CLARA (*cutting in ruthlessly*) You said that before But let me tell you, in the sight of Heaven Herbert and me's been married for twenty-five years

PARKER (*triumphantly*) And there you're wrong again, because in the sight of Heaven nobody's married at all—

HELLIWELL pops his head in, looking worried

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HELLIWELL Just come in the dining-room a minute, Albert We're having a bit of an argument——

PARKER Yes, Joe

HELLIWELL *disappears* PARKER *goes out, leaving door a little open* CLARA, *left alone, finishes her port, then picks up the old photograph and glares with contempt at the figures on it* A house bell can be heard ringing distantly now

CLARA (*muttering her profound contempt at the figures in the photograph*) Yer silly young softheads! (*Bangs it down in some prominent place, face up*)

RUBY *now looks in*

RUBY Mrs Soppitt——

CLARA (*rather eagerly*) Yes?

RUBY Mrs Helliwell says will you go into t' dining-room

As CLARA moves quickly towards door, RUBY adds coolly
Aaa—they're fratchin' like mad

CLARA *goes out quickly, followed by RUBY* We hear in distance sound of door opening, the voices of the three in the dining-room noisily raised in argument, the shutting of the door, then a moment's silence Then several sharp rings at the front door After a moment, RUBY's voice off, but coming nearer

(Off) Yes, I know All right 'Ere, mind them things
This way

RUBY *ushers in ORMONROYD, who is carrying his camera, etc, and is now very ripe*

ORMONROYD (*advances into room and looks about him with great care, then returns to RUBY*) Nobody here (*Gives another glance to make sure*) Nobody at all

RUBY They'll all be back again soon They're mostly in dining-room—fratchin'

ORMONROYD What—on a festive occasion like this?

RUBY That's right

ORMONROYD Well, it just shows you what human nature is Human nature! T-t-t-t-t I'll bet if it had been a funeral—they'd have all been in here, laughing their heads off (*He goes over and looks closely at the cigars*) There isn't such a thing as a cigar here, is there?

RUBY Yes, yer looking at 'em D'you want one? 'Ere (*As he lights it*) Me mother says if God had intended men to smoke He'd have put chimneys in their heads

ORMONROYD Tell your mother from me that if God had intended

men to wear collars He'd have put collar studs at back of their necks
(*Stares at her*) What are you bobbing up an' down like that for?

RUBY I'm not bobbing up an' down It's you (*Laughs and regards him critically*) You're a bit tiddly, aren't yer?

ORMONROYD (*horror-struck*) Tidd-ldly?

RUBY Yes Squiffy

ORMONROYD (*surveying her mistily*) What an ex't'ornry idea! You seem to me a mos' ex't'ornry sort of—little—well, I dunno, really—what's your name?

RUBY Ruby Birtle

ORMONROYD (*tasting it*) Umm—Ruby—

RUBY All right, I know it's a silly daft name, you can't tell me nowt about Ruby I 'aven't been told already—so don't try

ORMONROYD (*solemnly*) Ruby, I think you're quite ex't'ornry How old are you?

RUBY (*quickly*) Fifteen—how old are you?

ORMONROYD (*waving a hand, vaguely*) Thousands of years, thousands and thousands of years

RUBY (*coolly*) You look to me about seventy

ORMONROYD (*horrified*) Seventy! I'm fifty-four

RUBY (*severely*) Then you've been neglectin' yerself

ORMONROYD *looks at her, breathing hard and noisily*
Too much liftin' o' t' elbow

ORMONROYD (*after indignant pause*) Do you ever read the *Police News*?

RUBY Yes I like it All 'orrible murders

ORMONROYD Then you must have seen them pictures of women who've been chopped up by their husbands—

RUBY (*with gusto*) Yes—with bloody 'atchets

ORMONROYD (*impressively*) Well, if you don't look out, Ruby, you'll grow up to be one of them women (*Wanders away and then notices and takes up old photograph*)

RUBY (*looking at it*) Aaaaa!—don't they look soft? (*Looks suspiciously at him, dubiously*) How d'you mean—one o' them women?

ORMONROYD Don't you bother about that, Ruby, you've plenty of time yet

RUBY (*puzzled*) Time for what?

ORMONROYD (*intent on his art now*) Now what I'm going to do—is to take a flashlight group of the three couples—just as they were

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in the old photograph Now—let me see—— (*Very solemnly and elaborately he sets up his camera*)

RUBY (*who has been thinking*) 'Ere, d'you mean I've plenty of time yet to grow up an' then be chopped up?

ORMONROYD (*absently*) Yes

RUBY (*persistently*) But what would 'e want to chop me up for?

ORMONROYD Now you sit there a minute

RUBY I said, what would 'e want to chop me up for?

ORMONROYD (*putting her into a chair and patting her shoulder*) Perhaps you might find one who wouldn't, but you'll have to be careful Now you stay there, Ruby

RUBY (*hopelessly*) Are yer goin' to take my photo?

ORMONROYD (*grimly*) Not for a few years—yet—— (*Is now fiddling with his camera*)

RUBY (*after thoughtful pause*) D'you mean you're waiting for me to be chopped up? (*Cheerfully, not reproachfully*) Eeeee!—you've got a right nasty mind, 'aven't you? (*A pause*) Are you married?

ORMONROYD Yes

RUBY Yer wife doesn't seem to take much interest in yer

ORMONROYD How do you know?

RUBY Well, I'll bet yer clothes hasn't been brushed for a month (*Going on cheerfully*) Yer could almost make a meal off yer waist-coat—there's so much egg on it (*After pause*) Why doesn't she tidy you up a bit?

ORMONROYD (*busy with his preparations*) Because she's not here to do it

RUBY Doesn't she live with yer?

ORMONROYD (*stopping to stare at her, with dignity*) Is it—er—essential—you should know all about my—er—private affairs?

RUBY Go on, yer might as well tell me Where is she?

ORMONROYD Mrs Ormonroyd at present is—er—helping her sister to run a boarding-house called *Palm View*—though the only palm you see there is the one my sister-in-law holds out

RUBY Where? Blackpool?

ORMONROYD Not likely There's a place you go to live in—not to die in No, they're at Torquay (*With profound scorn*) *Torquay!*

RUBY (*impressed*) That's right down South, isn't it?

ORMONROYD (*with mock pompousness*) Yes, my girl, Torquay is on the South Coast of Devonshire It is sheltered from the northerly and easterly winds, is open to the warm sea breezes from the South,

and so is a favourite all-year-round resort of many delicate and refined persons of genteel society In other words, it's a damned miserable hole (*Surveys his arrangements with satisfaction*) There we are, all ready for the three happy couples

RUBY (*sceptically*) Did yer say 'appy?

ORMONROYD Why not?

RUBY Well, for a start, go an' listen to them four in t' dining-room

ORMONROYD (*beginning solemnly*) Believe me, Rosie——

RUBY (*sharply*) Ruby

ORMONROYD Ruby Believe me, you're still too young to understand

RUBY I've 'eard that afore, but nobody ever tells what it is I'm too young to understand An' for years me brother kept rabbits

ORMONROYD (*solemnly but vaguely*) It's not a question of rabbits—thank God! But marriage—marriage—well, it's a very peculiar thing There's parts of it I never much cared about myself

RUBY Which parts?

ORMONROYD Well—now I'm a man who likes a bit o' company An' I like an occasional friendly glass I'll admit it—I like an occasional friendly glass

RUBY It 'ud be all t' same if you didn't admit it We could tell (*Sniffs*)

ORMONROYD If these three couples here have been married for twenty-five years and—er—they're still sticking it, well, then I call 'em three happy couples, an' I won't listen to you or anybody else saying they're not No, I won't have it And if you or anybody else says "Drink their health" I say "Certainly, certainly, with pleasure——" (*Gives himself a whisky with remarkable speed*) Wouldn't dare to refuse, 'cos it would be dead against my principles Their very good health (*Takes an enormous drink*)

RUBY Eeee!—you are goin' to be tiddly

ORMONROYD (*ignoring this, if he heard it, and very mellow and sentimental now*) Ah—yes To be together—side-by-side—through all life's sunshine and storms—hand-in-hand—in good times and bad ones—with always a loving smile—— (*Waving hand with cigar in*)

RUBY (*coldly*) Mind yer cigar!

ORMONROYD In sickness and in health—rich or poor—still together—side-by-side—hand-in-hand—through all life's sunshine and storms——

RUBY (*quckly*) You said that once

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ORMONROYD Oh—yes—it's a wonderful—it's a bee-yutiful thing——

RUBY What is?

ORMONROYD *What is!* Lord help us—it's like talking to a little crocodile! I say—that it's a wonderful and bee-yutiful thing to go through good times and bad ones—always together—always with a loving smile——

RUBY Side-by-side—an' 'and-in-'and——

ORMONROYD Yes, and that's what I say

RUBY Then there must be summat wrong wi' me 'cos when I've tried goin' side-by-side an' 'and-in-'and even for twenty minutes I've 'ad more than I want

ORMONROYD (*staring at her*) Extr'ord'n'ry! What's your name?

RUBY It's still Ruby Birtle

ORMONROYD Well, haven't you had a home?

RUBY Course I've 'ad a home Why?

ORMONROYD You talk as if you'd been brought up in a tramshed
No sentiment No tender feeling No—no—poetry——

RUBY (*indignantly*) Go on I know Poetry We learnt it at school
'Ere——

RUBY *recites, as ORMONROYD sits*

They grew in beauty side by side,
They filled one home with glee,
Their graves are severed, far an' wide,
By mount and stream and sea

The same fond mother bent at night
O'er each fair sleeping brow,
She 'ad each folder flower in sight—
Where are those dreamers now?

One 'midst the forest of the west,
By a dark stream is laid—
The Indian knows his place of rest
Far——

RUBY *hesitates* CLARA *enters quietly and stares at her in astonishment* RUBY *gives her one startled look, then concludes hurriedly*

—Far in the cedar shade

RUBY *hurries out* CLARA *stands in RUBY's place* ORMONROYD, *who has turned away and closed his eyes, now turns and opens them, astonished to see CLARA there*

ORMONROYD (*bewildered*) Now I call that most peculiar, *most* peculiar I don't think I'm very well to-night—

CLARA (*same tone as RUBY used*) You're a bit tiddly, aren't you?

ORMONROYD Things aren't rightly in their place, if you know what I mean But I'll get it

CLARA Who are you, and what are you doing here?

ORMONROYD (*still dazed*) Henry Ormonroyd—*Yorkshire Argus*—take picture—silver wedding group—

CLARA (*firmly*) There's no silver wedding group 'll be taken *here* to-night

ORMONROYD Have I come to t' wrong house?

CLARA (*firmly*) Yes

ORMONROYD Excuse me (*Moving to door, which opens to admit ANNIE*)

ANNIE Who's this?

ORMONROYD (*hastily confused*) Nobody, nobody—I'll get it all straightened out in a minute—now give me time—

ORMONROYD *goes out*

ANNIE Isn't he the photographer?

CLARA (*bitterly*) Yes, an' he's drunk, an' when I come in, Maria's servant's reciting poetry to him, an' God knows what's become of Herbert an' Albert an' that Mrs Northrop an' (*angrily*) I'm fast losing my patience, I'm fast losing my patience—

ANNIE Now, Clara—

MARIA *enters, rather wearily*

MARIA I can't knock any sense at all into Joe Where's Herbert?

CLARA (*grimly*) Still looking for that Mrs Northrop

Front door bell rings

Somebody else here now

MARIA Well, don't carry on like that, Clara I didn't ask 'em to come, whoever it is

CLARA If you didn't, I'll bet Joe did With his *Yorkshire Argus*!

RUBY *enters, rather mysteriously*

MARIA Well, Ruby, who is it?

RUBY (*lowering voice*) It's a woman

CLARA (*hastily*) What woman?

MARIA Now, Clara! (*To RUBY*) What sort of woman? Who is it?

RUBY (*coming in, confidentially*) I don't know But she doesn't

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look up to much to me Paint on her face An' I believe her 'air's dyed

The three women look at each other

CLARA (*primly*) We don't want that sort o' woman here, Maria

MARIA Course we don't—but— (*Hesitates*)

ANNIE You'll have to see what she wants, Maria It might be something to do with—y'know—this business

CLARA (*angrily*) How could it be?

ANNIE Well, you never know, do yer?

CLARA Let Joe see what she wants

MARIA Oh—no—state of mind Joe's in, I'd better see her Ask her to come in, Ruby—and—er—you needn't bother Mr Helliwell just now

RUBY goes out *The three women settle themselves, rather anxiously* RUBY ushers in LOTTIE, who enters smiling broadly
MARIA rises, the other two remaining seated

MARIA (*nervously*) Good evening

LOTTIE Good evening

MARIA (*step down*) Did you want to see me?

LOTTIE (*coolly*) No, not particularly (*She sits down, calmly, and looks about her*)

The other three women exchange puzzled glances

MARIA Er—I don't think I got your name

LOTTIE No You didn't get it because I didn't give it But I'm Miss Lottie Grady

MARIA (*with dignity*) And I'm Mrs Helliwell

LOTTIE (*shaking her head*) No, if we're all going to be on our dignity, let's get it right You're not Mrs Helliwell You're Miss Maria Fawcett

CLARA (*as MARIA is too stunned to speak*) Now just a minute—

LOTTIE (*turning to her, with mock sweetness*) Miss Clara Gawthorpe, isn't it? Gawthorpe's, Greengrocer's, corner of Park Road (*Turning to ANNIE*) I'm afraid I don't know your maiden name—

ANNIE I'm Mrs Parker to you

LOTTIE Please yourself, I don't care I'm broadminded (*Surveying them with a smile*)

CLARA (*angrily*) I suppose that Mrs Northrop's been talking to you

LOTTIE Certainly Met in the old *Hare and Hounds*, where I used to work She's an old friend of mine

CLARA (*angrily*) If you've come 'ere to get money out of us—

LOTTIE Who said anything about money?

MARIA Well, you must have some idea in coming to see us

LOTTIE (*coolly*) Oh—I didn't come here to see any of you three

ANNIE Well, who did you come to see then?

LOTTIE (*smiling*) A gentleman friend, love

CLARA (*angrily*) *Gentleman friend!* You'll find none o' your gentleman friends in *this house*, will she, Maria?

MARIA (*indignantly*) I should think not!

ANNIE Just a minute, Clara I'd like to hear a bit more about this

LOTTIE Very sensible of you You see, if a gentleman friend gets fond of me—then tells me—more than once—that if he wasn't married already, he'd marry me—

CLARA (*grimly*) Well, go on

LOTTIE Well—then I suddenly find out that he isn't married already, after all, then you can't blame me—can you?—if I'd like to know if he's still in the same mind (*Beams upon them, while they look at each other in growing consternation*)

CLARA (*astounded*) Well, I'll be hanged

ANNIE Now we *are* getting to know something

MARIA (*flustered*) Clara—Annie (*Pause Suddenly to LOTTIE*) Who was it?

Front door bell rings

ANNIE Just a minute, Maria, there's somebody else here now

CLARA (*angrily*) Oh—for goodness' sake—can't you keep 'em out?

RUBY (*appearing, importantly*) The Rever-ent Clem-ent Mer-cer!

All three wives look startled, as MERCER, a large grave clergyman, enters, and RUBY retires

MERCER (*sympathetically*) Mrs Helliwell?

MARIA (*faintly*) Yes?

MERCER (*taking her hand a moment*) Now, Mrs Helliwell, although you're not a member of my congregation, I want you to realise that I feel it my duty to give you any help I can

MARIA (*confused*) I'm afraid—I don't understand—Mr Mercer

MERCER Now, now, Mrs Helliwell, don't worry Let's take everything calmly May I sit down? (*Takes chair and brings it down*)

MERCER *sits down, smiling at them* MARIA *sits*

ANNIE Did somebody ask you to come here?

MERCER Yes, madam A working man I know called Northrop

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stopped me in the street and told me to go at once to Alderman Helliwell's house as a clergyman's presence was urgently required here So here I am—entirely at your service

LOTTIE, *in danger of exploding, rises and goes quickly towards conservatory, where she stands with her back to the others* MERCER gives her a puzzled glance, then turns to the other three

Now what is it? Not, I hope, a really dangerous illness?

MARIA (*blankly*) No

MERCER (*rather puzzled*) Ah!—I hurried because I thought there might be But perhaps you feel some younger member of your family is in urgent need of spiritual guidance An erring son or daughter?

A noise from LOTTIE

CLARA (*forcefully*) No

MERCER (*puzzled*) I beg your pardon?

CLARA I just said *No* I mean, there aren't any erring sons and daughters Just husbands, that's all

MERCER (*rises*) Husbands?

LOTTIE *suddenly bursts into a peal of laughter, turning towards them* MERCER *looks puzzled at her*

LOTTIE (*laughing*) You've got it all wrong

MERCER (*rather annoyed*) Really! I don't see——

LOTTIE I think they want you to marry 'em

MERCER (*looking astounded*) *Marry them!*

ANNIE (*rising, with spirit*) 'Ere, Maria, come on, do something (*To MERCER*) You'd better talk to Mr Helliwell——

MARIA (*who has risen*) He's in the dining-room—just across—— (*Almost leading him out*) Ask him if he thinks you can do anything for us—— (*Now outside room*) Just in there—that's right——

CLARA (*to LOTTIE*) Which one was it?

MARIA *returns, flustered, shutting door, as LOTTIE returns to her seat, still smiling*

LOTTIE I think you missed a chance there—at least, two of you did

MARIA Two of us!

LOTTIE Well, you remember what I told you? (*Smiling reminiscently*) I'd known him here in Cleckleywyke, but it was at Blackpool we really got going He said he was feeling lonely—and you know what men are, when they think they're feeling lonely, specially at Blackpool

CLARA (*hastily*) It couldn't have been Herbert. He's never been to Blackpool without me

ANNIE Yes, he has, Clara Don't you remember—about four years since——?

CLARA (*thunderstruck*) And he said he hadn't a minute away from that Conference I'll never believe another word he says But your Albert was with him that time

ANNIE (*grimly*) I know he was

MARIA So was Joe Said he needed a change

LOTTIE (*sweetly*) Well, we all like a change, don't we?

SOPPITT *enters, rather hesitantly* CLARA *sees him first*

CLARA (*sharply*) Now, Herbert Soppitt——

SOPPITT Yes, Clara?

LOTTIE (*going to him*) Well, Herbert, how are you these days?
(*Playfully*) You haven't forgotten me, have you?

SOPPITT Forgotten you? I'm afraid there's a mistake——

CLARA (*grimly*) Oh—there's a mistake all right

MARIA Now, Clara, don't be too hard on him I expect it was only a bit o' fun

SOPPITT What is all this?

LOTTIE (*playfully*) Now, Herbert——

SOPPITT (*indignantly*) Don't call me Herbert

CLARA (*angrily*) No, wait till I'm out o' t' way

ANNIE I expect he didn't mean it

SOPPITT (*annoyed*) Mean *what*?

ALBERT PARKER *now enters, rather wearily* SOPPITT *turns to him*

I found that Mrs Northrop, Albert

LOTTIE Oh—hello, Albert!

PARKER (*staring at her*) How d'you mean—*Hello, Albert!*

LOTTIE (*playfully*) Now, now—Albert!

PARKER *looks at her in astonishment, then at the three women, finishing with his wife*

ANNIE (*bitterly*) Yes, you might well look at me, Albert Parker You and your cheap holiday at Blackpool! I only hope you spent more on her than you've ever done on me

PARKER (*vehemently*) Spent more on *her*? I've never set eyes on her before *Who is she?*

ANNIE and CLARA *now look at one another, then at MARIA, who looks at them in growing consternation*

MARIA I don't believe it I *won't* believe it

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RUBY *looks in, excitedly*

RUBY There's a motor-car stopping near t' front gate

CLARA (*shouting as RUBY goes*) Well, tell it to go away again

HELLIWELL *comes out of dining-room, bumping into RUBY as she goes out, and begins speaking early*

HELLIWELL (*who is flustered*) What with a photographer who's drunk and a parson who's mad——! (*He sees LOTTIE now, and visibly wilts and gasps*) Lottie!

MARIA (*furiously*) Lottie! So it was you, Joe Helliwell

HELLIWELL Me what?

MARIA Who said you'd marry her——

HELLIWELL (*shouting desperately*) That was only a bit o' fun

MARIA (*bitterly*) You and your bit o' fun!

RUBY (*importantly*) Mayor o' Cleckleywyke, *Yorkshire Argus*, *Telegraph and Mercury*

MAYOR *enters, carrying case of fish slices, with REPORTERS behind*

MAYOR (*pompously*) Alderman and Mrs Helliwell, the Council and Corporation of Cleckleywyke offers you their heartiest congratulations on your Silver Wedding and with them this case of silver fish slices

He is now offering the case to MARIA, who has suddenly sunk down on the settee and is now weeping. She waves the case away, and the bewildered MAYOR now offers it to HELLIWELL, who has been looking in exasperation between his wife, LOTTIE and the MAYOR. HELLIWELL takes the case and opens it without thinking, then seeing what is in it, in his exasperation, shouts furiously
An' I told yer before, Fred—I don't like fish (*Quick curtain*)

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

SCENE *As before About quarter of an hour later RUBY is tidying up the room, and also eating a large piece of pasty She continues with her work several moments after rise of curtain, then NANCY makes cautious appearance at conservatory, sees that nobody but RUBY is there, then turns to beckon in GERALD, and they both come into the room*

NANCY What's been happening, Ruby?

RUBY What 'asn't been 'appenning! Eee—we've had some trade on what wi' one thing an' another

NANCY (*mischievous rather than reproachful*) You see what you've done, Gerald

RUBY What! He didn't start it, did he? 'Cos if he did, he's got summat to answer for

NANCY Did—anybody ask where I was, Ruby?

RUBY No, an' I'll bet you could stop out all night and they'd neither know nor care

GERALD But what *has* been happening, Ruby?

RUBY (*confidentially*) Place 'as been like a mad-'ouse this last half-hour To start with, mayor o' Cleckleywyke's been and gone—

NANCY The mayor?

GERALD (*amused*) Why did they want to bring the mayor into it?

RUBY Nobody brought him He come of his own accord—with a case o' fish things an' wearing t' chain—like a chap in a pantymime He soon took his 'ook But reporters didn't—

GERALD Reporters, eh?

RUBY Ay, an' there were plenty of 'em an' all an' they didn't want to go, neither, not like t' mayor So Mr Hellwell an' Mr Parker took 'em into t' kitchen an' give 'em bottled ale an' for all I know they may be there yet Mrs Hellwell's up in t' bedroom—feeling poorly—an' Mrs Soppitt's with her Mr Soppitt an' Mrs Parker's somewhere out in garden—

NANCY I told you there was somebody there

RUBY Ah, but let me finish Now there's a woman wi' dyed 'air washing herself in t' bathroom upstairs—an' nobody knows what she wants—beyond a good wash Down in t' dining-room there's a photo-

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grapher who's right tiddly tryin' to argue with gert big parson—an' I'll bet he's makin' a rare mess—an' that'll be to do next

Exit RUBY

GERALD Sounds all very confused to me

NANCY Yes, and I'd better shp upstairs while nobody's about
Oh—Gerald

GERALD Nancy!

NANCY Do you still love me?

GERALD Yes, Nancy—still—even after a whole hour

They kiss Enter SOPPITT and ANNIE PARKER from conservatory

SOPPITT Here, I say! You two seem very friendly!

ANNIE I believe you were the girl he was seen with

SOPPITT Were you?

NANCY Yes We're practically engaged, you know Only—I was frightened of saying anything yet to Uncle Joe

SOPPITT Well, don't start to-night—

ANNIE Why shouldn't she? He won't be quite so pleased with himself to-night as usual—just as I know another who won't

NANCY Good night

ANNIE Good night Why don't you go outside and say good night properly? You're only young once

NANCY and GERALD exit to conservatory

ANNIE Yes, you're only young once, Herbert D'you remember that time, just after you'd first come to Cleckleywyke, when we all went on that choir trip to Barnard Castle?

SOPPITT I do, Annie As a matter of fact, I fancy I was a bit sweet on you then

ANNIE You fancy you were! I know you were, Herbert Soppitt Don't you remember coming back in the wagonette?

SOPPITT Ay!

ANNIE Those were the days!

SOPPITT Ay!

ANNIE Is that all you can say—Ay?

SOPPITT No But I might say too much

ANNIE I think I'd risk it for once, if I were you

SOPPITT And what does that mean, Annie?

ANNIE Never you mind But you haven't forgotten that wagonette, have you?

SOPPITT Of course I haven't.

He has his arm round her waist Enter CLARA

Hello, Clara

CLARA How long's this been going on?

ANNIE Now, don't be silly, Clara

CLARA Oh—it's me that hasn't to be silly, is it? I suppose standing there with my 'usband's arm round you bold as brass, that isn't being silly, is it? I wonder what you call that sort of behaviour, then?

SOPPITT It was only a bit of fun

CLARA Oh—an' how long have you been 'aving these bits o' fun—as you call them—Herbert Soppitt?

ANNIE You've a nasty mind, Clara

CLARA Well—of all the cheek and impudence! Telling me I've got a nasty mind You must have been at it some time getting Herbert to carry on like that with you Don't tell me he thought of it himself, I know him too well

ANNIE Oh—don't be so stupid, Clara I'm going into the garden I want some fresh air

She goes out

CLARA Well, Herbert Soppitt, why don't you follow her and get some fresh air, too? Go on, don't mind me Come here

SOPPITT *doesn't move*

You 'eard me, come here!

SOPPITT Why should I?

CLARA Because I tell you to

SOPPITT I know I heard you But who do you think you are?

CLARA Herbert Soppitt—you must have gone wrong in your head

SOPPITT No Not me I'm all right

CLARA (*sharply*) You'd better go home now an' leave me to deal with this business here

SOPPITT (*bravely*) Certainly not

CLARA In my opinion it's awkward with both of us here

SOPPITT (*pause*) Well, *you* go home then!

CLARA What did you say?

SOPPITT (*bravely*) I said, *you* go home You are doing no good here

Very angry now, she marches up to him and gives him a sharp slap on the cheek

CLARA Now then! (*Steps back and folds arms*) Just tell me to go home again!

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SOPPITT (*slowly, impressively, approaching her*) Clara, I always said that no matter what she did, I'd never lift a hand to my wife——

CLARA I should think not indeed!

SOPPITT But as you aren't my wife—what about this?

He gives her a sharp slap She is astounded

CLARA Herbert!

SOPPITT (*commandingly*) Now sit down (*Pointing*)

She does not obey In a tremendous voice of command
Sit down!

She sits, staring at him Then when she opens her mouth to speak
Shut up! I want to think

A silence, during which she still stares at him

CLARA (*in a low voice*) I don't know what's come over you, Herbert Soppitt

SOPPITT (*fiercely*) You don't, eh?

CLARA (*gaping at him*) No, I don't

SOPPITT (*severely*) Well, you don't think I put up with women coming shouting and bawling at me and smacking my face, do you?

CLARA Well—you've never gone on like this before

SOPPITT Yes, but then before you were my wife——

CLARA (*hastily*) I'm your wife now

SOPPITT Oh, no—you're not (*Produces letter*)

CLARA Give me that letter!

SOPPITT Sit down—and shut up, woman!

Enter ALBERT PARKER

PARKER Where's Annie?

SOPPITT She's out there somewhere—why don't you look for her?

CLARA Perhaps she's hiding her face—and if you'd seen what I'd seen to-night, Albert Parker——

SOPPITT Hold your tongue before it gets you into mischief!

CLARA I'm only——

SOPPITT Shut up

PARKER Here, but wait a minute—I'd like to hear a bit more about this

SOPPITT Then you're going to be disappointed (*To CLARA*) You get back to Maria Hellrwell, go on!

PARKER Here, Clara, you're not going to——

SOPPITT YOU mind your own business! (*To CLARA*) Go on—sharp

CLARA *exits*

PARKER Herbert, 'ave you been 'aving a lot to drink?

SOPPITT I had a few, trying to find that Mrs Northrop

PARKER I thought as much

SOPPITT And I may possibly have some more, but whether I do or not, I'll please myself—just for once—and if any of you don't like it, you can lump it

PARKER Where did you say my wife was?

SOPPITT She's out there in the garden

PARKER (*disapprovingly*) What—at this time o' night? (*Looking to garden*)

SOPPITT Yes—and why not?

PARKER (*with dignity*) I'll tell 'er that I've no need to tell you You're not my wife

SOPPITT No, and she isn't, either Don't forget that

PARKER *goes to the door and calls*

PARKER Annie! Hey—Annie!

SOPPITT Why don't you go out and talk to her, instead o' calling her like that—as if she were a dog or something?

PARKER 'Cos standing about in damp grass this time o' night is bad for me I don't want to start a running cold on top of all this (*Calls again*) Hey—Annie! (*Turns to SOPPITT*) I came in to 'ave a few words in private with her—

SOPPITT Oh—I'll leave you

PARKER In my opinion, there's been a lot too much talk among us altogether, too much noisy 'anky-panky about this daft business You might think we were a meeting o' t' gas committee way we've gone on so far What's wanted is a few serious words i' private between us chaps an' our wives, an' less o' this public argy-bargy an' 'anky-panky

ANNIE PARKER *enters through conservatory*

Ah—so there y'are

SOPPITT (*going*) Well, best o' luck, Annie!

PARKER (*suspiciously*) How d'you mean?

SOPPITT (*turning at door*) Hanky-panky!

He goes out

PARKER He's 'ad a drop too much, Herbert 'as! Comes of running round the town after that charwoman!

ANNIE (*amused*) Well, Albert?

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PARKER (*pompously and complacently*) Well, Annie, I'm going to set your mind at rest

ANNIE (*demurely*) Thank you, Albert

PARKER (*pompously and complacently*) Yes, I don't want you to be worrying. Now I think you'll admit I've always tried to do my duty as a 'usband

ANNIE Yes, Albert, I think you've always tried

PARKER (*suspiciously*) What do you mean?

ANNIE (*demurely*) Why—just what you mean, Albert

PARKER (*after another suspicious glance, returns to former tone, and is insufferably patronising*) Of course, as nobody knows better than you, I'm in a different position altogether to what I was when I first married you—

ANNIE When you *thought* you married me, Albert

PARKER Well, you know what I mean! In them days I was just plain young Albert Parker

ANNIE And now you're Councillor Albert Parker—

PARKER Well, an' that's something, isn't it? And it isn't all, by a long chalk. I've got on i' business, made money, come to be a big man at chapel, vice-president o' t' Cricket League, on t' hospital committee, an' so forth—eh?

ANNIE Yes, Albert, you've done very well

PARKER (*complacently*) I know I 'ave. An' munda you, it's not altered me much. I'm not like some o' 'em. No swank about me—no la-di-dah—I'm a plain man

ANNIE (*rather sadly*) Yes, Albert, you are

PARKER (*looking at her suspiciously*) Well, what's wrong wi' it? You're not going to tell me that at your time o' life—

ANNIE (*indignantly cutting in*) My time of life!

PARKER Well, you're no chicken, are yer? And I say, you're not going to tell me now, at your time o' life, you'd like a bit o' swank an' la-di-dah!

ANNIE (*wistfully*) I've sometimes wondered—

PARKER (*brushing this aside*) Nay, nay, nay, nobody knows better than me what you'd like. An' you know very well what a good husband I've been steady—

ANNIE (*rather grimly*) Yes, you've been steady all right, Albert

PARKER (*complacently*) That's what I say. Steady. Reliable. Not silly wi' my money—

ANNIE (*same tone*) No, Albert, your worst enemy couldn't say you'd ever been silly with your money

PARKER (*complacently*) And yet at the same time—not stingy No, not stingy Everything of the best—if it could be managed—everything of the best, within reason, y'know, within reason

ANNIE Yes, within reason

PARKER (*in a dreamy ecstasy of complacency*) Always reasonable—and reliable But all the time, getting on, goin' up i' the world, never satisfied with what 'ud do for most men—no, steadily moving on an' on, up an' up—cashier, manager, share in the business—councillor this year, alderman next, perhaps mayor soon—that's how it's been an' that's how it will be Y'know, Annie, I've sometimes thought that right at first you didn't realise just what you'd picked out o' t' lucky bag Ay! (*Contemplates his own greatness, while she watches him coolly*)

ANNIE (*after a pause*) Well, Albert, what's all this leading up to?

PARKER (*recalled to his argument*) Oh!—Well, yer see, Annie, I was just saying that I thought I'd been a good husband to you An', mind yer, I don't say you've been a bad wife—no, I don't—

ANNIE (*dryly*) Thank you, Albert

PARKER (*with immense patronage*) So I thought I'd just set your mind at rest Now don't you worry about this wedding business If there's been a slip up—well, there's been a slip up But I'll see you're all right, Annie I'll see it's fixed up quietly, an' then we'll go an' get married again—properly (*He pats her on the shoulder*) I know my duty as well as t' next man—an' I'll see that you're properly married to me

ANNIE Thank you, Albert

PARKER That's all right, Annie, that's all right I don't say every man 'ud see it as I do—but—never mind—I know what my duty is

ANNIE And what about me?

PARKER (*puzzled*) Well, I'm telling yer—you'll be all right

ANNIE How d'you know I will?

PARKER (*hastily*) Now don't be silly, Annie If I say you'll be all right, you ought to know by this time yer *will* be all right

ANNIE (*slowly*) But I don't think I want to be married to you

PARKER (*staggered*) *What!*

ANNIE (*slowly*) You see, Albert, after twenty-five years of it, perhaps I've had enough

PARKER (*horrified*) 'Ad enough!

ANNIE Yes, had enough You talk about your duty Well, for

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

twenty-five years I've done my duty I've washed and cooked and cleaned and mended for you I've pinched and scrimped and saved for you I've listened for hours and hours to all your dreary talk I've never had any thanks for it I've hardly ever had any fun But I thought I was your wife and I'd taken you for better or worse, and that I ought to put up with you——

PARKER (*staring, amazed*) *Put up with me!*

ANNIE (*coolly*) Yes, put up with you

PARKER But what's wrong with me?

ANNIE (*coolly*) Well, to begin with, you're very selfish But then, I suppose most men are You're idiotically conceited But again, so are most men But a lot of men at least are generous And you're very stingy And some men are amusing But—except when you're being pompous and showing off—you're not at all amusing You're just very dull and dreary——

PARKER Never!

ANNIE (*firmlly*) Yes, Albert *Very dull and very, very dreary and stingy*

PARKER (*staring at her as if seeing a strange woman*) 'As somebody put you up to this?

ANNIE No, I've thought it for a long time

PARKER How long?

ANNIE Nearly twenty-five years

PARKER (*half dazed, half indignant*) Why—you—you—you little serpent!

ANNIE (*ignoring this*) So now I feel it's time I enjoyed myself a bit I'd like to have *some* fun before I'm an old woman

PARKER (*horrified*) *Fun! Fun!* What do you mean—fun?

ANNIE (*coolly*) Oh—nothing very shocking and terrible—just getting away from you, for instance——

PARKER (*in loud pained tone*) Stop it! Just stop it now! I think—Annie Parker—you ought to be ashamed of yourself

ANNIE (*dreamily*) Well, I'm not Bit of travel—and liveness—and people that are amusing—and no wool business and town councillors and chapel deacons——

PARKER (*shouting angrily*) Why don't you dye your hair and paint your face and go on t' stage and wear tights——?

ANNIE (*wistfully*) I wish I could

As PARKER groans in despair at this, RUBY looks in

RUBY (*loudly and cheerfully*) Mr Soppitt says if you haven't

finished yet yer better 'urry up or go somewhere else to 'ave it out 'cos they're all coming in 'ere

PARKER (*angrily*) Well, we 'aven't finished

ANNIE (*coolly*) Yes, we have

RUBY *nods and leaves the door open*

PARKER (*loudly*) Now listen, Annie, let's talk a bit o' sense for a minute——

ANNIE They'll all hear you—the door's open

PARKER Nay—damn it——!

Goes to shut door, but SOPPITT and CLARA enter

SOPPITT (*amused*) Hello, Albert—what's made you look so flabbergasted?

PARKER (*annoyed*) If I want to look flabbergasted, then I'll look flabbergasted, without asking your advice, Herbert

SOPPITT Hanky-panky!

PARKER Now shut up! 'Ere, Clara, yer wouldn't say I was stingy, would yer?

CLARA Well, you've never been famous for getting your hand down, have you, Albert?

PARKER (*indignantly*) I've got my 'and down as well as t' next man I've always paid my whack, let me tell yer Call a chap stingy just because he doesn't make a big show—'cos he isn't—er——

ANNIE (*burlesquing his accent, coolly*) La-di-dah!

SOPPITT Now stop tormenting him, Annie

PARKER (*indignantly*) Tormenting me! Nobody 'll torment me And I like that coming from *you*, Herbert, when you've been a by-word for years

CLARA (*angrily*) A by-word for what?

PARKER For years

CLARA Yes, but a by-word for years for what?

PARKER Oh! Hen-pecked! Ask anybody who wears trousers in your house!

ANNIE Albert, don't be so vulgar!

PARKER Why, a minute since you wanted to wear tights

ANNIE Only in a manner of speaking

PARKER How can it be in a manner of speaking?—'cos either you're wearing tights or you're not

Enter LOTTIE and JOE HELLIWELL.

LOTTIE What's this about tights?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PARKER Now you'll clear out right sharp—if you'll take my tip

LOTTIE And I'll bet it's the only kind of tip you do give, too (To ANNIE) He looks stingy to me!

PARKER Stingy! If anyone says that again to me to-night—I'll—I'll give 'em jip

Exit PARKER

HELLIWELL For two pins I'd either leave this house myself or else clear everybody else out I've never seen such a place—there's folk nattering in every damn corner!

ANNIE Where's poor Maria?

SOPPITT Clara!

Exeunt SOPPITT, CLARA and ANNIE

HELLIWELL Now, Lottie, be reasonable A bit o' devilment's all right, but I know you don't want to make real mischief—

LOTTIE Where's the mischief come in? Didn't you say—more than once—that if you hadn't been married already—?

HELLIWELL (*urgently to her*) Now, you know very well that were only a bit o' fun When a chap's on a 'oliday in a place like Blackpool an' gets a few drinks inside 'im, you know very well he says a lot o' damn silly things he doesn't mean—

LOTTIE (*indignantly*) Oh—I see Just tellin' me the tale an' then laughing at me behind my back, eh?

HELLIWELL (*urgently*) No, I don't mean that, Lottie Nobody admires you more than I do You're a fine lass and a good sport But you've got to be reasonable Coming 'ere *like this*, when you know as well as I do, it were just a bit o' fun!

MARIA *enters* *She is dressed to go out, and is carrying some housekeeping books, some keys, and several pairs of socks*

MARIA (*at door, leaving it open, grimly*) Just a minute, Joe Helliwell!

HELLIWELL (*groaning*) Oh—Christmas! (*Then sees she has outdoor things on.*) 'Ere, Maria, where are yer going?

MARIA (*determined, but rather tearful*) I'm going back to me mother's

HELLIWELL *Your mother's!* Why, if you go to your mother in this state o' mind at this time o' night, you'll give her a stroke

LOTTIE That's right. She must be about ninety.

MARIA (*angrily*) She's seventy-two (*Pauses*) And mind your own business I've got some of it 'ere *for you*

LOTTIE What do you mean?

MARIA (*indicating things she's carrying*) Some of your new business, an' see 'ow you like it You'll find it a change from carrying on wi' men behind the bar

HELLIWELL What in the name o' thunder are you talking about?

MARIA I'm talking about 'er If she wants my job, she can 'ave it

LOTTIE } 'Ere, just a minute——

HELLIWELL } Now listen, Maria——

MARIA (*silencing them by holding up keys and rattling*) There's all t' keys, an' you'd better start knowing where they fit (*Puts them on table behind settee*) An' don't forget charwoman's just been sacked, an' I don't expect Ruby'll stay You'll have to manage by yourself a bit An' greengrocer calls at ten and the butcher calls at half-past——

HELLIWELL (*shouting*) What does it matter when t' butcher calls?

MARIA (*calmly*) I'm talking to 'er, not to you. (*To LOTTIE, who looks astonished*) These is the housekeeping books an' you'll 'ave to 'ave 'em straight by Friday or he'll make a rumpus 'Ere you are

LOTTIE (*backing away*) I don't want 'em

HELLIWELL (*harassed*) 'Course she doesn't——

MARIA She can't run this house without 'em You said so yourself (*Throws books on to settee*)

HELLIWELL I know I did, but it's nowt to do with 'er

MARIA Then what did she come 'ere for? (*To LOTTIE, producing socks*) An' look, 'ere's five pairs of his socks and one pair of woollens (*hangs them on back of settee*) that wants darning, and you'd better get started on 'em An' upstairs you'll find three shirts and two more pairs of woollens you'll 'ave to do to-morrow, an' you'd better be thinking o' to-morrow's dinner, 'cos he always wants something *hot* an' he's very *particular*—— (*Turns towards door*)

LOTTIE (*aghast*) 'Ere, what do you think I am?

HELLIWELL Now, Maria, you're getting it all wrong Nobody knows better than me what a good wife you've been Now 'ave a bit of sense, love It's all a mistake

MARIA And there's a lot of other things you'll have to manage, but while you're trying to manage them and him, too, I'll be at Blackpool

She goes, followed by HELLIWELL

Enter ORMONROYD

ORMONROYD I know that face.

LOTTIE Harry Ormonroyd

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

ORMONROYD Lottie, my beautiful Lottie And you haven't forgotten me?

LOTTIE Forgotten you! My word, if you're not off I'll saw your leg off 'Ere, you weren't going to take their photos?

ORMONROYD Yes, group for *Yorkshire Argus* Make a nice picture—very nice picture

LOTTIE Nice picture! Don't you know? Haven't they told you? (*Roars with laughter*)

ORMONROYD Here now, stop it, stop it Have a drink of port

LOTTIE Well, I suppose I might

ORMONROYD Certainly, certainly Liberty 'All here to-night

LOTTIE Oh—it's Liberty Hall right enough Chin—chin

ORMONROYD All the best, Lottie

LOTTIE Nice drop of port wine this Joe Helliwell does himself very well here, doesn't he?

ORMONROYD Oh, yes, Lottie, you'll find everything very comfortable here 'Ere, somebody told me you were back at the Talbot

LOTTIE I was up to Christmas Who told you? Anybody I know?

ORMONROYD (*solemnly*) Yes—now just a minute You know him I know him We both know him I have him here on the tip of my tongue Er— (*but can't remember*) no But I'll get him, Lottie, I'll get him

LOTTIE Then I had to go home Our Violet—you remember our Violet—she married a sergeant in the Duke of Wellington's—the dirty Thirty-Thirds—and now she's in India

ORMONROYD (*remembering, triumphantly*) Tommy Toothill!

LOTTIE What about him?

ORMONROYD (*puzzled by this*) Nay, weren't you asking about 'im?

LOTTIE No, I've something better to do than to ask about Tommy Toothill

ORMONROYD (*still bewildered*) Quite so, Lottie But what were we talking about him for? Didn't you say he'd gone to India?

LOTTIE No, you fathead, that's our Violet Oh—I remember, it must have been Tommy Toothill 'at told you I was working at the Talbot—d'you see?

ORMONROYD (*still bewildered*) Yes, I know it was But what of it, Lottie? Aren't you a bit argumentative to-night, love?

LOTTIE (*good-naturedly*) No, I'm not, but you've had a couple too many

ORMONROYD Nay, I'm all right, love 'Ere, what's happened to your Violet?

LOTTIE (*impatiently*) She married a sergeant and went to India

ORMONROYD (*triumphantly*) Of course she did Somebody told me—just lately

LOTTIE I told you

ORMONROYD (*reproachfully*) Yes, I know—I can 'ear But so did somebody else I know—Tommy Toothill'

LOTTIE You've got him on the brain Then at Whitsun—I took a job at Bridlington—but I only stuck it three weeks No life at all—I told 'em, I says "I don't mind work, but I do like a bit of life"

ORMONROYD I'm just the same Let's 'ave a bit of life, I say An' 'ere we are, getting down in dumps, just because Tommy Toothill's gone to India

LOTTIE He hasn't, you piecan, that's our Violet Nay, Harry, you're giving me the hump

ORMONROYD Well, play us a tune, just for old times' sake

LOTTIE Aaaa, you silly old devil, I'm right glad to see you

ORMONROYD Good old times, Lottie, good old times

They sing Interrupted by entrance of HELLIWELL, PARKER and SOPPITT

HELLIWELL Now what the hangment do you think this is—a tap-room? *Yorkshire Argus* wants you on telephone

LOTTIE Come on, love, I'll help you

HELLIWELL And then get off home

ORMONROYD See you later

ORMONROYD and LOTTIE *exit*

PARKER Now, what's wanted now is a few serious words in private together

HELLIWELL Yes, yes, Albert I know But give a chap time to have a breather I've just had to persuade Maria not to go back to her mother's

PARKER Why, what can her mother do?

HELLIWELL Oh—don't start asking questions—just leave it, Albert, leave it, and let me have a breather

Enter the three wives, all with hats and coats on

ANNIE Now then—Albert—Joe—Herbert—

HELLIWELL What is this—an ultimatum?

MARIA Joe Helliwell, I want you to answer one question

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

HELLIWELL Yes, Maria?

MARIA Joe, do you love me?

HELLIWELL (*embarrassed*) Now what sort of a question is that to come and ask a chap—here? Why didn't you ask me upstairs?

MARIA (*solemnly*) Orce and for all—do you or don't you?

HELLIWELL Yes, of course I do, love

MARIA Then why didn't you say so before?

All three women sit down, take off hats

PARKER (*as if beginning long speech*) And now we're all by ourselves it's about time we started to put our thinking caps on, 'cos we're not going to do any good running round the 'ouse argy-bargy-ing—

MARIA That's right, Albert

PARKER Yes, but let me finish, Maria We—

He is interrupted by RUBY appearing round door

RUBY (*loudly, cheerfully*) She's back!

MARIA Who is?

RUBY That Mrs Northrop. (*Withdraws, leaving door open*)

HELLIWELL (*loudly, in despair*) Oh—Jerusalem—we don't want 'er 'ere

MRS NORTHROP (*appearing, still carrying bag, and flushed*) If you don't want me here why did you send 'im round chasing me and askin' me to come back? Yer don't know yer own minds two minutes together (*To MARIA*) You 'aven't settled up wi' me yet, y'know

HELLIWELL (*annoyed*) Outside!

PARKER (*hastily, anxiously*) Half a minute, Joe, we can't 'ave her telling all she knows—we'll be t'laughing stock of Cleckleywyke to-morrow

MRS NORTHROP (*contemptuously*) Yer've bin that for years, lad I'd rather ha' Joe Helliwell nor you Joe 'as 'ad a bit o' fun in his time, but you've allus been too stingy

PARKER (*the word again*) *Stingy!* If anybody says that again to me to-night, they'll get what for, an' I don't care who it is

HELLIWELL (*to MRS NORTHROP*) I told you—outside—sharp!

MRS NORTHROP (*full of malice*) Suits me I reckon naught o' this for a party You can't frame to enjoy yourselves But then there's one or two faces 'ere that 'ud stop a clock, never mind a party But wait till a few of 'em I know 'ears about it! You'll 'ear 'em laughing at back o' t'mill right up 'ere.

PARKER Now we can't let her go i' that state o' mind

CLARA You ought to charge 'er with stealin'

MRS NORTHROP (*horried*) Stealin'! Why—for two pins—I'll knock yer lying 'ead off, missis Never touched a thing i' my life that wasn't me own!

RUBY *looks in, and* MRS NORTHROP *sees her*

What is it, love?

RUBY (*loudly, chiefly to* HELLIWELL) That photographer's asleep an' snoring be telephone

HELLIWELL (*irritably*) Well, waken him up an' tell him to go home

RUBY *withdraws* MRS NORTHROP *takes charge again*

MRS NORTHROP (*significantly*) An' I *could* keep me mouth shut if it were worth me while——

CLARA (*almost hissing*) That's blackmail!

SOPPITT (*hastily*) Shut up, Clara!

MRS NORTHROP (*looking at him*) Hello, you've come to life, 'ave yer?

HELLIWELL (*to* MRS NORTHROP) How much d'you want?

MARIA (*angrily*) I wouldn't give her a penny

CLARA (*quickly*) Nor me, neither

PARKER (*quickly*) Can we trust 'er—we've no guarantee?

SOPPITT (*quickly*) She could sign something

ANNIE (*quickly*) That'd be silly

MARIA (*quickly*) Not one single penny!

HELLIWELL (*angrily*) Will you just let *me* get a word in—an' be quiet a minute? Now then——

RUBY (*looking in*) Mr Helliwell!

HELLIWELL (*impatiently*) What?

RUBY I wakened 'im an' told 'im to go 'ome But 'e says 'e is at 'ome (*Withdraws as* HELLIWELL *bangs and stamps in fury*)

HELLIWELL (*at top of his voice*) What is this—a bloody mad-'ouse?

MERCER (*off, but approaching*) Mr Helliwell! Please!

HELLIWELL (*groaning*) Oh!—Jehoshaphat!—another of 'em!

MERCER *enters*

MERCER (*sternly*) Mr Helliwell, I cannot allow you to use such language It's quite unnecessary

HELLIWELL (*protesting*) You wouldn't think so if——

MERCER (*cutting in*) Quite unnecessary A little patience—a little quiet consideration—that's all that is needed

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

HELLIWELL What—with folk like her? (*Pointing to Mrs NORTHROP*)

MERCER (*surprised and disapproving*) Mrs Northrop! What are you doing here?

MARIA (*quickly*) Making trouble!

MERCER (*before Mrs NORTHROP can speak*) Making trouble? (*He stoops a little, near her*) And you've been drinking again

MRS NORTHROP (*humble, crestfallen*) Only a drop or two—just because I was a bit upset—

MERCER (*accusingly*) And then you come and make a nuisance of yourself here *T-t-t-t!* What's to be done with you? I am ashamed of you after all your promises

MRS NORTHROP (*humble and flattering*) Oh—Mr Mercer—you're a wonderful man—an' you're t'only preacher i' Cleckleywyke worth listening to (*To the others, roundly*) Aaaa!—he's a fine preacher is Mr Mercer Like—like a—gurt lion of a man! (*To MERCER admiringly*) Ay, y'are that an' all

MERCER (*briskly, masterfully*) Now, Mrs Northrop, flattery won't help You've broken all your promises I'm ashamed of you

MRS NORTHROP (*almost tearful now*) Nay—Mr Mercer—

MERCER Now—go home quietly—

MARIA (*quickly*) She'll tell all the town about us

MERCER We cannot allow that Mrs Northrop, you must make me a solemn promise

MRS NORTHROP (*looking up at him, humbly*) Yes, Mr Mercer

MERCER Now promise me, solemnly, you will tell nobody what you've heard here to-night Now promise me

MRS NORTHROP (*in solemn quavering tone*) I promise (*Making suitable gestures*) Wet or dry may I die

MERCER T-t-t-t-t But I suppose that will do Now off you go, quietly home, and be a good woman Good night, Mrs Northrop

MRS NORTHROP (*humbly*) Good night, Mr Mercer, and thank you very much (*Turns at door to address the company*) Aaaa!—he's a gurt lion of a man— (*Fiercely, a parting shout*) Worth all you lot put together

She goes

HELLIWELL (*with relief*) Well, we're rid o' one (*To MERCER*) Now have you studied that letter, Mr Mercer?

MERCER (*producing it*) I've considered it very carefully (*Impressively*) And you know what I think?

SEVERAL OF THEM (*eagerly*) No Tell us (*Etc*)

MERCER (*slowly*) This letter—in my opinion—is perfectly genuine

HELLIWELL (*disgustedly*) I thought you were going to tell us
summat we didn't know

MERCER (*ignoring this*) I am sorry to say it—but—quite obviously
—you are, none of you, really married

PARKER (*bitterly*) 'Ere, don't rub it in (*Hopefully*) Unless, of
course, you re prepared to marry us yourself—quietly—now

MERCER (*indignantly*) Certainly not Quite impossible

HELLIWELL (*impatiently*) Well—what the hangment are we going
to do, then?

MERCER (*turning to him impressively*) My dear sir—— (*Then
quickly*) I don't know

HELLIWELL (*disgusted*) Oh—Christmas!

MERCER But if you want my final opinion, I think that if there
were less bad temper and bad language in this house, and a little
more patience and quiet consideration, you would have a better
chance of settling your affairs

HELLIWELL (*exasperated*) And I think I'm getting a bit tired o'
you, Mr Mercer

MERCER (*very angry, towering over HELLIWELL*) What! After
wasting my time, you now have the audacity—— Here!

HELLIWELL *flinches, but it is the letter he is being given*
Good night, sir Good night, ladies

He marches out and bangs doors HELLIWELL *breathes heavily
and wipes his face*

HELLIWELL Well, that's another we're rid of

PARKER (*beginning in his usual style*) And now what's wanted——

CLARA (*cutting in, mimicking him*) Is a few serious words We
know But what's really wanted now is a bit o' brainwork, and
where we're going to get it from I don't know

HELLIWELL (*severely to CLARA*) You'll get it from me if you'll
keep quiet a minute

*They concentrate hard, and now ORMONROYD, still carrying a
large glass of beer, comes in and sits down in the chair centre,
while they stare at him in amazement and disgust*

ORMONROYD (*cheerfully*) Now—let's see—what were we talking
about?

PARKER (*angrily*) We weren't talking about anything to you

ORMONROYD (*ignoring this*) I wouldn't object to a nice hand at

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

cards (*To HELLIWELL, who is looking exasperated*) I like a game o' solo, don't you?

HELLIWELL No And I told you to get off 'ome

ORMONROYD (*reproachfully*) Nay, but you want your photo o' t'group, don't you?

PARKER You'll take no photos 'ere to-night

ORMONROYD Now it's a funny thing you should ha' said that I'm a chap 'at notices things—I 'ave to be in my profession—an' I've been telling meself there's people 'ere in this 'ouse to-night who isn't easy in their minds No, there's summat a bit off 'ere—just you see

CLARA Oh—for goodness' sake—

ORMONROYD (*to HELLIWELL*) And people has to be easy in their minds to be photographed Nobody ever comes with the toothache, y'know, to 'ave their photos taken

SOPPITT (*seriously*) No, I don't suppose they do It never occurred to me—that

ORMONROYD Name, sir?

SOPPITT Soppitt

ORMONROYD Ormonroyd 'ere There's thought in this face I'd like to do it some time in a nice sepia finish Remind me, Mr Soppitt

LOTTIE *enters*

Ah, there y'are, Lottie Join the company

MARIA (*to LOTTIE*) I thought you'd gone long since

HELLIWELL You know very well you promised to go, half an hour since

CLARA (*rises*) We ought to put poloe on you

ORMONROYD Now what's the idea of picking on Lottie? Why don't you live and let live? We're all in the same boat We all come 'ere and we don't know why We all go in our turn and we don't know where If you are a bit better off, be thankful An' if you don't get into trouble an' make a fool of yourself, well be thankful for that, 'cos you easily might What I say is this—we're all human, aren't we?

ANNIE Yes, and thank you, Mr Ormonroyd

PARKER What yer thanking him for? Who's he to start telling us what we ought to do?

CLARA Impudence, I call it (*Telephone rings*)

ORMONROYD Oh, me? I'm nothing much But in case you want to be nasty, Councillor Albert Parker, just remember though I may be nothing I 'appen to work for a newspaper Behind me stands the

Press, don't forget that, an' the Press is a mighty power in the land to-day——

RUBY *enters*

RUBY Telephone went and when I says "Who is it?" chap said "Yorkshire Argus—is Ormonroyd, our photographer there?" an' when I says "Yes, he's still 'ere," he says "Well, tell him he's sacked" You're sacked I'm sorry

RUBY *exits*

ORMONROYD (*suddenly crushed*) So am I, lass I left a bag in 'ere somewhere

LOTTIE You must have left it down at *Lion*, lad

PARKER I thought 'e couldn't carry corn

ANNIE Shut up, Albert

LOTTIE Nay, Harry, you silly old devil, it's not so bad

ORMONROYD It's not so good Hard to know where to turn

LOTTIE Come on, lad, never say die We've seen a bit of life an' we'll see some more before they throw us on the muck heap (*To others*) For two pins, I'd take him away now, and leave you to settle your own troubles—if you can

HELLIWELL Why—what's he got to do with our troubles?

LOTTIE Plenty Now, Harry, tell 'em where you were married

ORMONROYD Nay, Lottie, they don't want to hear about my bad luck

PARKER We've enough of our own, without his

ANNIE No, Albert Come on, Mr Ormonroyd

LOTTIE Tell 'em where you were married

ORMONROYD Lane End Chapel—five an' twenty years since

HELLIWELL 'Ere, he must be in t'same boat with us then

ORMONROYD Just another o' my bits of bad luck

CLARA We can understand that all right

LOTTIE Yes, but Harry 'ere had separated from his wife and they wanted to be free

HELLIWELL Well, what were they worrying for? They were free Parson hadn't proper qualifications

LOTTIE Hold on a minute go on, Harry

ORMONROYD I know he hadn't Wife found that out But what she'd forgotten, till I got a copy o' t'certificate, is that in them days—twenty-five years since—chapel wedding—registrar had to be there an' all—to sign certificate

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PARKER Joe, he's right

ORMONROYD I know damn well I'm right I've been carrying certificate for months trying to find a loophole in it—see for yourself

CLARA Are we married after all?

HELLIWELL Yes, of course we are If parson didn't tie us up, registrar did—all legal—as right as ninepence

CLARA Aaaaa, thank God!

MARIA Mr Ormonroyd, this is best night's work you ever did Thank you

LOTTIE Now then, Harry, buck up, lad Why don't you take that little photo shop in Blackpool again?

ORMONROYD Nay, it 'ud cost me about a hundred pound to start it again—and I haven't a hundred shillings—an' I know you haven't

LOTTIE No, but there's folk here who'd never miss it

PARKER 'Ere, steady

ANNIE Albert, stingy again?

PARKER Nay, never—if that's how you feel——

HELLIWELL We'll soon fix you up, Ormonroyd lad, leave it to me By gow, you've taken a load off my mind—— Aaaaa—— Now then, everybody, let's brighten up (*At door*) Who'll give us a song? Ruby Ruby bring some more drinks, lass Owt you've got

ANNIE Let's sing a bit

ORMONROYD Lottie's the one Come on, Lottie, play us a tune

CLARA Now then, Herbert Soppitt, you see, I am your wife after all

SOPPITT Yes, Clara, and I hope we'll be very happy But we won't be if you don't drop that tone of voice I don't like it

CLARA Yes, Herbert

SOPPITT *begins to sing*

PARKER 'Ere, Joe, you wouldn't say I was dull and dreary, would you?

HELLIWELL Ay, a bit, Albert

PARKER Well, that beats me I've always seemed to myself an exciting sort of chap (*To ANNIE*) Anyhow, stingy or whatever I am, I'm still your husband

ANNIE So it looks as if I'll have to make the best of you

MARIA We'll all have to make the best of each other But then, perhaps it's what we're here for

HELLIWELL That's right, love

ACT III WHEN WE ARE MARRIED

PARKER Well, we'd better see if we can have some of this fun of yours you talk about

ANNIE Aaaa, it doesn't matter, Albert

PARKER It does I say we'll have some fun (*Takes her hand and begins singing They are all singing now*)

ORMONROYD (*loudly*) All in your places We'll have this group yet, and to hell with the *Yorkshire Argus*' Now, steady—steady—everybody

*Enter RUBY The flashlight goes off and RUBY drops her tray
But they are all singing as curtain falls*

END OF PLAY

GOOD NIGHT CHILDREN

A Comedy of Broadcasting

CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

JOE COSSART, engineer
EDNA DARLINGTON, a secretary
DOROTHY LIMPLE, a secretary
BRENDA GEE, a secretary
BOB DINTY, an actor
HETTY LODORE, an actress
FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT, announcer
TRISTAN SPROTT, a producer
MOYA GRONOVA, a pianist
COMMANDER COPLEY, regional director
PAULA LEEDS, a producer
MARTIN BRADBURN, a producer
PERCY KING, effects boy
DAISY PUNNET, Matthew's grand-daughter
MATTHEW PUNNET, an ancient musician
SIR REGINALD RUNTON, D A D G

ACT I
Morning

ACT II
Middle of the Afternoon

ACT III
Evening

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*First produced at the New Theatre, London, on February 5th, 1942,
with the following cast*

EDNA DARLINGTON	JOSEPHINE DENT
BRENDA GEE	PATRICIA HAYES
JOE COSSART	CHARLES LAMB
DOROTHY LIMPLE	NAN HOPKINS
BOB DINTY	FRED GROVES
HETTY LODORE	EILEEN BELDON
FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT	PATRICK LUDLOW
TRISTIN SPROTT	NAUNTON WAYNE
MOYA GRONOVA	INA DE LA HAY
COMMAND COPLEY	CHARLES MORTIMER
PAULA LEEDS	GILLIAN LIND
MARTIN BRADBURN	MANNING WHILEY
PERCY KING	GEORGE COLE
DAISY PUNNET	JEAN SHORT
MATTHEW PUNNET	MEADOWS WHITE
SIR REGINALD RUNTON	LAWRENCE HANRAY

ACT I

The Scene is the English Broadcasting Company's regional studio in the remote county of Barset. It is a large square room, handsomely fitted out in the modern style. There is a door downstage right (actors'), which leads to the main entrance to the studio. There is another door on the same side at the back that communicates with the rest of the building, the offices, etc. Also on this side is a desk, used by FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT, the announcer. Nearer the centre is a similar desk, used by PAULA LEEDS. Also in the centre are a small settee and one or two chairs. Further left is a grand piano. Then downstage left are microphones and a space for broadcasting. Behind is a glass-enclosed producers' control room, with a small flight of stairs leading up to it. There are no windows in the studio.

Before the rise of curtain the interval signal of the E B C is heard from the piano—on the second E B C the curtain rises—on the fourth E B C the "six pips" are heard, then the telephone signal flickers.

At Rise the studio is in half darkness, interval signal going. JOE, a middle-aged solemn engineer, enters and goes to the telephone in control cabin.

JOE (at telephone) No, this isn't the South-Western Dairy Farmers—it's the English Broadcasting Company—

EDNA, a rather colourless secretary, enters, puts files, etc. on centre desk, switches on lights and returns to desk upstage end. She is followed in by DOROTHY, who is a tall, handsome, rather stupid girl—yes, the English Broadcasting Company. No, I can't get your sister an audition.

Puts down telephone.

DOROTHY (left of desk) This is a note from Commander Copley to Miss Leeds, explaining that the workmen will be in her office to-day and to-morrow.

EDNA Miss Leeds will be very annoyed at being out here.

DOROTHY Why? It won't kill her.

EDNA We have two programmes going out from here to-day—the Children's Hour this afternoon and then Mr Sprott's Barset programme to-night. Mr Sprott will probably want to rehearse both this morning and this afternoon. So how can Miss Leeds do any work in here? Why couldn't Commander Copley have put her—

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

DOROTHY *starts to go up right*

—in one of the other two offices?

DOROTHY Because the workmen are going to be in there, too
There's something wrong with the walls

EDNA There's always something wrong with something here

DOROTHY (*right of desk*) I don't know why you people are always
grumbling I like it here, and after all I've just had two years in
London—at Radio House

EDNA Oh—I know why *you* like it here

DOROTHY (*haughtily*) What do you mean?

Enter BRENDA hurriedly She is a lively young girl

BRENDA Have you got a stop-watch?

EDNA (*hastily*) Yes, and you're not going to have it What have
you done with yours?

BRENDA (*drifting slowly across stage to sofa*) It's just gone again
I think somebody eats 'em Oh dear—I wish they'd hurry up and
give me that audition—I'm so tired of being a secretary It isn't the
life for me at all

Re-enter JOE from control room

JOE (*coming down*) Rehearsal here this morning, isn't there?

BRENDA Yes, Mr Sprott's programme for to-night—"Down Here
in Barset"

JOE (*who is testing piano, mikes, etc*) "Down Here in Barset"
I read what it said in the *Broadcasting Times* "Another fascinating
medley of folk-lore and song from a fragrant corner of old England!"
Escapism, that's what I call it (*At large arm mike*) Fragrant Corner!
(*Turns to EDNA*) Did you read what the County Medical Officer
said? No, of course you didn't But that's what they ought to be
telling the workers—what the Medical Officer said—and never mind
their fascinating medleys

DOROTHY I don't think that's being very loyal to the E B C

JOE Now listen, Miss Limple 'Cos you're working for Com-
mander Copley and he seems to have taken a fancy to you, that's no
reason why you should start talking like him

DOROTHY (*haughtily*) I don't agree

Goes out

BRENDA I do hate that girl. I wish she'd stayed in London

JOE (*now sitting on stool down left*) How are the impersonations
coming along, Brenda?

BRENDA (*eagerly*) I'm working on Katherine Hepburn now I

went to see her film again, last night I think I've got her Listen! (*Announces herself grandly*) My next impression is that of the famous stage and film star—Katherine Hepburn—(*does something to her hair, then acts madly at JOE, who does not turn a hair*) “Aw shucks, Larry, don't take it that way—I didn't mean it that way, Larry—all I meant was just the two of us to go right away somewhere—back to your ranch if that's what you want—I want light, I want freedom, Larry, I want the great spaces, my dear—yes, the silent music of the great spaces—don't you see, Larry?” Um?

EDNA I don't think it's quite right yet, Brenda

JOE (*rising*) Oh—I think it's good

BRENDA Thank you, Joe

JOE Who is it you're doing?

BRENDA (*surprised*) Katherine Hepburn

JOE (*seriously*) Never heard of her

Enter BOB DINTY He is a middle-aged actor and an odd mixture of jauntiness and gloom

BOB Morning, girls Morning, Joe

They reply cheerfully

I met a fella in the *Lion* last night who distinctly remembered me in *White Cargo* at Nottingham ten years ago Knew me at once, he said And stood a round on it Got my scripts, Brenda?

BRENDA (*crossing to desk*) Yes, here it is I'm working up the Katherine Hepburn now, Mr Dinty

BOB That's right, just keep working them up, Brenda I believe you have something—(*with a wink at the others*)—if you can only bring it out

BRENDA (*eagerly*) You wouldn't like to hear——

BOB (*looking at script, crossing to couch*) Not to-day, dear It 'ud take my mind off my work Hetty been in yet?

BRENDA *sits at HAYCRAFT'S desk*

EDNA I haven't seen her

BOB Still shopping, I expect (*Begins to read script*)

JOE (*approaching confidentially*) Bob!

BOB Yes, old boy?

JOE (*confidentially*) Did you say anything to Haycraft about me doing that bit in the *Children's Hour*?

BOB Yes, I did, old boy But he didn't seem to catch on, you know what these chaps are

JOE (*with great dignity*) They're afraid of the big realities

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Goes up into control room

BOB (*deep in his script*) The way they cut the fat out of these parts—it's terrible Too much stop-watch, that's the trouble

BRENDA (*rises and crosses right of desk*) You haven't seen a stop-watch, have you?

BOB (*gloomily*) Not yet But it'll be there all right when we start rehearsing

Enter HETTY, a middle-aged actress Her line is all sympathy, sweetness and light

HETTY (*sweetly*) Good morning, everybody I hope I'm not late

EDNA No, Hetty, Mr Sprott's not here yet

HETTY Thank you, Edna Now, Brenda, can I have a look at my scripts? Quite a busy day to-day, isn't it? (*As she gets scripts*) Thank you, Brenda The woman at the greengrocer's was so interested when she knew I was working for the E B C She was almost certain she recognised my voice Wasn't that nice? (*Crossing to couch*)

BRENDA Yes, Miss Lodore

Moving above piano

HETTY She insisted on me giving her my autograph for her niece at Weston-super-Mare (*Confidentially to BOB*) I got a lovely duck, but she'll only cook it for lunch

BOB I don't want it for lunch, not with two shows ahead of us The time for roast duck is when we've done our work

HETTY Yes, dear, but you see—she's going out this afternoon to see her sister—you know, the one who's—

BOB Don't tell me Life's bad enough without knowing what's gone wrong with the landlady's sister The point is, she won't cook it for to-night, and I won't eat it at lunch time So where are we?

Enter FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT, tall, humourless, and still the golden-voiced announcer

HAYCRAFT Good morning Anyone asking for me?

BRENDA No, Mr Haycraft, But there are two letters on your desk

HAYCRAFT Thank you, Brenda (*Opening letter*)

BOB I appeal to you, Fairfax Would you eat roast duck just before doing two shows?

HAYCRAFT (*horrified*) Good heavens—no, Bob! Certainly not! I've always made it a rule never to eat anything hours before announcing

HETTY (*sweetly*) Yes, but you're different Everybody knows *your* voice You couldn't afford to take any risks, could you?

BOB I suppose it doesn't matter if I gurk out of a million loud-speakers

HAYCRAFT (*referring to letters*) Really, I must say some of these listeners are very tiresome—the arrogant way in which they talk about switching you on and off

BOB They've been spoilt, that's why Pay half a guinea—and then expect sixteen hours' a day continuous entertainment for a year—it's been made too cheap, that's the trouble

HAYCRAFT You're probably right, Bob (*Rising*) Oh—Hetty—while I remember—

HETTY (*crossing to him, all attention*) Yes, Fairfax?

HAYCRAFT When I say—at the beginning of our Children's Hour programme—"But where's Aunt Hetty this afternoon?" don't reply at once

HETTY All right When do I reply?

HAYCRAFT I'll call "Aunt Hetty, Aunt Hetty!" Then I'll go on "I say, children, this is serious No Aunt Hetty"

HETTY Oh, I like that, Fairfax Gives me quite a build-up

BOB What's the point of giving *you* a build-up?

HAYCRAFT Now, Bob! Then you come running in—you can do it across the mike—breathless effect—"Here I am—so sorry, Uncle Fairfax Hello, children!"

HETTY (*giving her best at once*) Oh—lovely! (*Does the breathless effect*) "Here I am—so sorry, Uncle Fairfax! Hello, children!"

BRENDA (*in surprising child voice*) Hello, Aunt Hetty!

Rises and sits on "Effects box"

BOB (*disgusted*) Good God!

HETTY (*sweetly*) Very clever, Brenda—

HAYCRAFT And then we'll go straight on, Hetty I thought of it at breakfast this morning It just gives a little touch of suspense, doesn't it?

HETTY Oh—yes—beautiful touch I'll mark it in my script (*Does so*)

Enter hurriedly TRISTAN SPROTT, a fantastic youngish man, carrying telephone with very long lead and plug He is followed by MOYA GRONOVA, very dark, intense, foreign, with her music MS He stops abruptly

TRISTAN (*with great energy and decision*) Good morning, play-mates! Edna, get me Lovedale 4289

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

Gives telephone to EDNA

They reply "Good morning, Mr Sprott," or "Tristan" He sits at desk centre

MOYA But—Mr Sprott, please, *please!* I know this music is wrong There is some mistake in the copying—or something—

TRISTAN Tell that to Tony Winter

MOYA (*in despair*) But he's not here—he's gone to London

TRISTAN London! That reminds me Has that effects boy from London arrived yet?

EDNA No, not yet

BRENDA Could I do some effects? (*Slight move down*)

TRISTAN The only effect I want from you, Brenda, is that of a dead silence

MOYA But I *know* this music is wrong—and Tony Winter is away—and to-night we go on the air with it—so?

TRISTAN We'll see what it sounds like at rehearsal Go and chew it over at the piano—but quietly, quietly, we're very busy Has an old man with a serpent arrived?

HETTY What!

TRISTAN It isn't that kind of serpent

HETTY What kind of a serpent is it then?

TRISTAN It's a musical instrument You blow them My "Down Here in Barset" programme to-night will be unique, and the talk of all the tap-rooms It may initiate a great national movement back to the land Here—(*noticing PAULA's desk*) is this mine? (*Opens drawer and picks out pair of stockings*) Oh—no, it's Paula's Oh dear, oh dear! Does this mean she's going to sit here all day watching us rehearse? That'll be too delicious

EDNA (*at telephone*) Lovedale 4289

TRISTAN Thank you very much (*As he goes to telephone*) I knew when I woke this morning and remembered *who* I was and *where* I was that this was going to be a most peculiar day (*He has said the last words into the telephone*) No, peculiar day's not the name Tristan Sprott's the name—yes, E B C Now what about that old man who plays the serpent—yes, Matthew Punnet—old Matt? . . . No, not yet—and I'll have to rehearse him for *hours* Oh, his grand-daughter's bringing him, is she? Daisy Punnet Oh yes, of course, she's in my cast too You're sure they've left?

Enter DOROTHY.

DOROTHY (*proudly*) Commander Copley wants to speak to you all.

TRISTAN. What did you say?

DOROTHY Commander Copley's coming in to talk to you all

TRISTAN Don't be silly (*Back at telephone*) No, not you—one of the girls here Now what about the other three rustics? Can't leave before five? Coming in by car, are they? Well, tell them to come straight here and ask for me I'll have to rehearse them like fury We're on the air at eight-fifteen All right, I'm depending on you to get 'em off clean and sober—and of course I'm desperately obliged Good-bye

Rises, crosses up left, drops receiver on to BOB's lap

Enter JOE up right to control cabin

MOYA (*at piano*) Now, Mr Sprott, listen—*please*—and you will see what I mean——

She plays a rather discordant phrase or two

TRISTAN *downstage end of piano*

TRISTAN No, that can't be right I rather like that

Picks up glass with rose in it and takes it to sofa and sits

MOYA But can it possibly be music for this so sweet rural programme "Down Here in Barset"?

TRISTAN No, Moya Someone has blundered Just put back the sugar into it, will you

BOB replaces receiver and sits box

JOE (*suddenly turning, loudly*) Pure escapism, that's what I call it

TRISTAN Now, Joe, not so rugged, please Besides you've not seen Matthew Punnet yet and heard his serpent

COMMANDER COPLEY *enters* *He is a solemn but professionally "hearty" type*

ALL Good morning, Commander

TRISTAN Now let's have it straight from the shoulder

COPLEY You're all here, aren't you?

DOROTHY Miss Leeds isn't here yet

COPLEY Oh—isn't she? Well—er—that doesn't matter, really——

TRISTAN And no effects boy yet either

Picks pencil off centre desk

COPLEY They've definitely sent one down He'll be here any minute now (*Looks round importantly*) Look here, I've had a memo from Radio House—it's a circular thing, asking all us regional directors to give you all a bit of a jaw——

TRISTAN (*solemnly*) Not *really* a straight-from-the-shoulder

COPLEY That's about it, Tristan Now I don't mind telling you

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all that I'm going to say to them at Radio House that, so far as this Barset regional station's concerned, no such talk from me or anybody else is necessary I know you're trying to pull together We've got our jobs to do, and a pretty important job it is too when you think of the number of decent people who are regular listeners these days——

HAYCRAFT (*seriously*) Hear, hear!

TRISTAN Hear, hear!

COPLEY There's been a tendency lately at Radio House to regard this particular regional studio of ours—perhaps because it's one of the smallest and furthest from London—to regard it, I say, as a kind of (*hesitates*)

TRISTAN Chain gang for the hard cases

COPLEY Well, not quite that—Tristan exaggerates, as usual—but perhaps rather on those lines And what seems to some of us here in Barset a pretty bad show——

HAYCRAFT Definitely It's all wrong

TRISTAN Oh—rotten bad show, chaps!

COPLEY But as for making any appeals for your loyal co-operation and—er—asking you to play the game, I'm not going to do it—for the simple reason that I know jolly well that here in Barset it simply isn't necessary We all know how to work together—and to play together As I've said before—(*leaning on desk*)——

But the entrance of PAULA LEEDS suddenly dries him up She is an attractive, carelessly dressed girl, with a sardonic manner

PAULA (*going up right*) Good morning (*She notices her desk—and stops*) Sorry to interrupt the prize-giving—but isn't this my desk?

COPLEY The workmen are in your office for a day or two

PAULA (*sitting down*) So I'm practically out in the street

TRISTAN And shortly you'll be in the middle of my rehearsal

PAULA (*sitting centre desk*) I thought of that too

COPLEY (*to PAULA and TRISTAN*) By the way, I forgot to say that another producer is arriving from London this morning

PAULA (*staggered*) What—another producer?

TRISTAN Perhaps he's going to relieve you or me, Paula Who is it?

COPLEY I don't know—and—between ourselves—I think the whole thing rather preposterous I've had a chit saying this fella—whoever he is—arrives to-day He's written—*Demanding a Quiet Office*

TRISTAN He's got a hope!

PAULA He'll be lucky if he gets a chair

COPLEY Also, he wants a full-time secretary, preferably Dorothy Limple——

DOROTHY (*interested*) You didn't tell me that

COPLEY Oh, he isn't going to claim you—don't worry And then he asks for specially recorded rehearsals with playbacks——

PAULA Local auditions, I'll bet

BOB And a full symphony orchestra

COPLEY All that sort of thing Really, it's pretty steep We're quite capable of producing anything that's required of us here, without all this nonsense

TRISTAN (*with mock solemnity*) Of course we are

COPLEY I shall send him a stiff note—a rouser

TRISTAN Who, Rudolph?

COPLEY Yes, Rudolph Well—that's all—everybody, and thank you

TRISTAN He's going to send Rudolph a rude one, a rouser

COPLEY *goes out, followed by DOROTHY*

PAULA (*with irony*) Rudolph—Rudolph? Now where have I heard that name before?

TRISTAN (*in the same vein*) Rudolph Persimmon, dear He's the director of our Drama Department—your director—my director—have you forgotten—is it all so long ago, dear?

PAULA (*in faint, far-away tone*) I've been so long here in Barset And he never comes here, does he?

TRISTAN Great heaven's, girl, no! He once borrowed a fur coat and an interpreter and spent half a day in Manchester (*Sits sofa*) By the way, I've discovered the most fabulous ancient—straight out of Hardy—who plays the serpent I'm practically building to-night's programme round that serpent

PAULA And rehearsing him first here?

TRISTAN Of course

PAULA Tristan, no good'll come of this

TRISTAN Why not?

PAULA You're too enthusiastic Every time you're enthusiastic something happens.

TRISTAN But if I'm not enthusiastic, then nothing happens And we're not quite Civil Servants, even yet

HAYCRAFT Tristan, there are several questions I'd like to ask——

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MOYA (*suddenly starting up from piano*) Mr Sprott—what shall I do about this music—I——

TRISTAN (*with decision*) Now listen—Bob—Hetty—all of you—get your scripts I'll want you too, Brenda Just as yourself, y'know—no impersonations

BOB But where are we going, old boy?

TRISTAN Along to the little talks studio

BRENDA The workmen are in there too, Mr Sprott

TRISTAN Then they must clear out for half an hour

MOYA But there's no piano in there

TRISTAN You can mark your cues, and we'll have a proper run through in here later this morning Come on, chaps—play the game for old Barset——

As he shepherds them through the door PAULA calls him back

PAULA Tristan, just a minute

TRISTAN Yes, blossom?

PAULA There isn't room here for another producer So they must be relieving one of us Um?

TRISTAN If one of us can go back to London—then it has to be you I've always known that

PAULA I was going to say it could be you

TRISTAN You'd let me go? But why, duckie? You know you loathe it here

PAULA Yes, but you still believe in broadcasting I don't think I do So I might as well be here as anywhere else Besides——

DOROTHY *enters with memos*

TRISTAN Sh! Admiralty Intelligence approaching

DOROTHY *gives one memo to TRISTAN, then puts another on*

PAULA'S desk TRISTAN *begins reading his, while PAULA ignores hers and looks across at JOE*

PAULA Good morning, Joe I didn't notice you

JOE Morning, Miss Leeds Sorry I couldn't manage a desk phone for you, but it 'ud be more bother than it would be worth

PAULA It doesn't matter, thanks, Joe I'm hardly ever rung up I don't think anybody except my mother and the administration department knows I'm here

TRISTAN (*picks up memo from desk*) Joe, very interesting internal memo here Just pay attention (*Reads*) "In future, acting assistant directors bracket unpaid bracket will be differentiated from acting assistant directors by being designed as quotation mark A stroke A

quotation mark, the A stroke A without quotation marks being reserved for acting assistant directors " See?

JOE (*cautiously*) No, I don't quite follow that, Mr Sprott

TRISTAN (*going*) Never mind, it gives one a lift, so to speak—helps one through the morning, doesn't it?

Exit TRISTAN

JOE *crosses to PAULA at desk*

JOE (*with great solemnity*) If you want *my* opinion, Miss Leeds—it's this Just as there's too much escapism about a lot of our programmes, there's a bit too much red tape in the administration

PAULA I think you've got something there, Joe I'd work on it

Nods, smiles, to dismiss him

He goes out EDNA now picks up the bulky MS

EDNA What about this? You said you'd send it back this morning

PAULA (*looking at it with distaste*) Oh—dear—yes *The Fall of Jerusalem*, a radio play by the Reverend A S Humphrey Harborough I know his niece This is what you get for knowing clergymen's nieces (*Moving to sofa*) All right

EDNA *rises*

(*Dictating*) "Dear Mr Harborough—" or is it Dr Harborough?—"Thank you for letting me see your *Fall of Jerusalem* I am afraid I must return it as unfortunately it would take about two hours and a half to perform, needs about fifty actors, a full chorus and orchestra, and would cost several thousand pounds to produce, and therefore it is rather too ambitious for our present scale of production You could, of course, send it to our director of drama at Radio House, Mr Rudolph Persimmon, but I'm afraid he has not recovered yet from the Fall of Old Vienna as you may have noticed from his programmes—"

EDNA *giggles*

"No, you'd better leave that out Stop after Persimmon "I hope Eileen is well It's a long time since I heard from her Yours sincerely " And make a nice parcel of it, Edna

EDNA I'll be awfully glad to see the last of it

PAULA And ask about the copyright on those four items

As she hands over the paper, DOROTHY enters and without speaking or smiling, rather haughtily, deposits a memo on the desk Exit

Well, what's the latest from the quarter-deck? (*Reads*) "It has been recently brought to my notice that certain members of the senior staff have lately neglected to leave telephone numbers which would find them when off duty and away from their normal base I should

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also like to remind them that office hours must be more strictly observed " My God, what cheek! I thought it was some little wreath of poison ivy by the way that girl handed it out I'm sorry—but I don't like our Commander's new secretary I hope she's not a bosom friend of yours by this time, Edna?

EDNA No, I think she's too jolly conceited I wouldn't mind if it were just because she's so attractive to look at—and she is, you know—

PAULA Oh yes, a terrific charmer

EDNA Well, I wouldn't mind that, but she's so pleased with herself because she's had two years in Radio House

PAULA I've had ten years of it in London, and I—but—perhaps I'm as bad Oh dear!

EDNA Oh—no—it's different for you

PAULA (*crossing to desk*) Thank you, Edna Always a comforting phrase that—different for us I don't believe it, but I like it (*Sits desk*)

EDNA (*rises*) I'll get these things done upstairs—shall I?

PAULA Do

EDNA *goes out* PAULA *works quietly for a few moments*

The next time she looks up it is because MARTIN BRADBURN has entered He is an attractive, serious, enthusiastic, untidy fellow in his early thirties He marches in, then stops short as he notices

PAULA

MARTIN (*obviously dismayed*) Good lord!

PAULA (*with hint of rebuke*) Good morning!

MARTIN (*with suggestion of apology*) Oh—good morning!

PAULA (*laughing*) Oh—good lord! (*Swings round*)

MARTIN I didn't know *you* were here

PAULA They ought to have warned you

MARTIN Why ought they to have warned me?

PAULA I don't know, but you seemed pretty taken aback As if there'd once been something rather desperate between us If there was, it simply escaped my memory, that's all Perhaps it's living in the country

MARTIN (*rather confusedly*) No, of course not Stupid of me to give you that impression The fact is, I never went to bed last night—what with one thing and another

PAULA I see Well, we did have rather a row about that series we did together—when was it—two years ago? I gathered then you weren't exactly mad on me

MARTIN Well, you gave me to understand very plainly that *I* wasn't exactly your favourite colleague either You ended by calling me a conceited ape

PAULA But that was after you'd called me a viperous virgin

MARTIN Did I? We did have a stinking row, didn't we? (*Sits and looks pleasantly at her*) But—you know—there was something about you that brought out the worst in me

PAULA I know what you mean It's practically hate at first sight You seem rather more human down here, but I expect that'll soon wear off You're not, by any chance, the producer we're expecting—a quiet office, full-time secretary, recorded rehearsals, symphony orchestras——?

MARTIN All right, all right, I catch the note of sarcasm But naturally I asked for a few reasonable conditions when I said I wanted to come down here——

PAULA Wait a minute! You *asked* to come down here?

MARTIN Yes, of course They didn't want to let me go—Rudolph was piling the programmes on me in town—but I insisted——

PAULA You're not wearing a hair shirt as well, are you?

MARTIN You've got it all wrong (*Rises, obviously embarrassed*) Actually this is all the wildest piece of self-indulgence

PAULA Are you sure you've come to the right region? This is Barset, you know—B for boring, A for awful, R for rural, S for stupid——

MARTIN (*breaking in*) I wish you wouldn't be facetious all the time I remember how it annoyed me before Must be a complex or something

PAULA (*quietly*) It happens to be shyness

MARTIN (*surprised*) Good lord!

PAULA We're not going to begin that again, are we?

MARTIN Sorry! I was genuinely surprised

PAULA (*rises and crosses to front of desk*) I hate to say it, but—you've been doing some lovely work, you know I thought that liner programme was beautifully produced

MARTIN Oh—you heard that one, did you? But, you see, producing—in the theatre—is really my job

PAULA I know But what made you insist upon doing a programme down here?

MARTIN Because I'm mad—I—(*checks himself*)

PAULA Well?

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MARTIN Dorothy Limple *is* here, isn't she?

PAULA Yes Oh!—I see

MARTIN Yes, I'm as mad as that (*Rises and crosses to door and back to PAULA*) What's she doing here?

PAULA She's secretary to our director, Commander Copley

MARTIN Don't know him What's he like?

PAULA Oh—just a strong silent man from the blue water No interest in drama, music, entertainment, talks—and probably hates broadcasting

MARTIN (*grinning*) I'll bet he hates *you*

PAULA He does And wonders why I was wished on him

MARTIN Why were you?

PAULA I was too impertinent At the programme meetings, when we discussed everything, but always got back to the last waltz in Old Wien, our romantic Rudolph never quite liked the look in my eye So they said "Barset for you, my girl" And wait until you've had a few weeks down here Love may find a way—and all that—but—

MARTIN I'm not sure I'd call it love exactly—

PAULA Well, you'll have plenty of time to settle all that, Bradburn Hadn't you better report to the quarter-deck? (*Moving to desk and pushing him*)

MARTIN (*gloomily*) Suppose I had Where is the Admiral, Leeds?

PAULA Through that door (*Sits*)

As he turns towards door DOROTHY comes through, and then stops in surprise at seeing him

MARTIN Dorothy!

DOROTHY Martin! (*Stops by HAYCRAFT's desk*) Oh—this is ridiculous I wondered if it was going to be you

MARTIN (*going to her*) I want to explain—

DOROTHY There's nothing to explain

MARTIN Of course there is

DOROTHY There *isn't* And you'd no *right* to come here—it makes me—Oh—it's so stupid *Please*

Brushes past him He follows her

MARTIN But Dorothy!—

She goes out and he follows her PAULA with a shrug, turns to her work again PERCY enters and collides with MARTIN He is an unperturbable Cockney youth, and talks American slang with a

London accent He taps PAULA on shoulder PAULA looks up and recognises him

PERCY Remember me, Miss Leeds?

PAULA Of course I do, Percy How are you?

PERCY Fine and dandy

PAULA I'm fine but I'm not dandy

PERCY Remember the bother we 'ad with them French Revolution noises?

PAULA Yes, Percy, I don't know how I'd have made the French Revolution without you

PERCY What's it like 'ere, Miss Leeds?

PAULA I don't think you'll enjoy it much

PERCY No Country, isn't it?

PAULA Yes, there's quite a lot of country round here, Percy, you know, fields and cows and sheep and so on

PERCY I thought so Worse than Bristol

PAULA Oh, much worse than Bristol

PERCY Too slow for me, I like to step out and go places (*Sees the piano*) 'Ere, would you mind if I played a bit of dirt?

PAULA No, go ahead, Percy, and express yourself

He dashes over to the piano and plays some swing music in a fine slapdash style He is interrupted by GRONOVA, who rushes in

GRONOVA No, no, please, please!

PERCY Please what?

GRONOVA Please stop this horrible playing——

PERCY Don't you like swing?

GRONOVA No, it is terrible!——

PERCY Oh, classical pianist, eh?

GRONOVA Yes, a musician—and to-day is very difficult—we are in all kinds of trouble with the programme

PERCY Listen, sister, you can't tell me anything about trouble with programmes——

GRONOVA Then you will understand—and excuse me——

PERCY Sure, I'll excuse you—— 'Ere, can you play Bach? (*He pronounces it—Batch*)

GRONOVA (*all smiles*) Bach! Yes, for years I have played Bach, you like him, eh?

PERCY I think he's a piece of cheese!

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

TRISTAN *enters down right hastily He has his coat off now, and looks very wild*

TRISTAN (*right up to PERCY*) Where is that effects boy? (*Sees PERCY*) Ah—(*and peers at PERCY*)—there you are! I couldn't be more relieved I suddenly thought I must have imagined you, after you just popped in and out like that

PERCY You wouldn't need a bit of good swing in this programme of yours, would you, Mr Sprott?

TRISTAN I would, but the programme wouldn't It's all rural, y'know Dainty old-world Dear old rustic Barsetshire What I do want is a reaper, and cider gurgling down, and the sound of darts and shove-ha'penny at the old *Brown Cow*

PERCY (*complacently*) I've done plenty of them

TRISTAN I'll show you a script Come on

He goes out

PERCY (*as he goes, to PAULA*) Looks like he's out on a limb, Mr Sprott I like your style better, Miss Leeds You've a poker face

Goes out

PAULA And bless his little heart, I say (*Looks at GRONOVA, who has sat down, and plays a few notes—distressed*) What's the matter, Moya?

GRONOVA Everything (*Rises*) It is one of those days, my dear When life is altogether too much Not large and simple and beautiful—it is then we are happy But small, petty, and yet—terrible (*Sits*) Like that awful *sweeng* (*Rises, crosses to her*) Yes, this *sweeng*—it expresses this small but terrible life we live Yet life could so easily be large and simple and beautiful—

PAULA No Chekhov, Moya, please! I don't like Chekhov in the morning

GRONOVA (*back to her and leans over desk*) You pretend to be hard, Paula my darling, just to protect your real self—your lovely tender inner self

PAULA There might be something in that, but don't start working on it

GRONOVA If I were a man, my dear, I would make love to you—just to be able to pull aside that mask I think I must take an aspirin Have you one, please?

Crosses and sits settee right

PAULA Not here (*Rises*) Edna will have some She lives on them in a quiet, ladylike way

PAULA *goes to telephone*

Miss Darlington, please! Oh Edna, have you any aspirin?
Well, pop one in water and bring it here for Moya. Perhaps you'd better make it two.

As she turns away from the telephone, DOROTHY enters a pace or two in front of MARTIN, who is still arguing with her. DOROTHY makes straight for the other door.

MARTIN (*pursuing*) What's the good of telling me it's undignified? It's more than that—it's damned fatuous. But we've got to have it out—we can't go on like this.

She has gone now, and he has followed.

GRONOVA *has risen and moved a little up.*

GRONOVA (*all eyes and ears*) Did you hear him? (*Turns to PAULA*)

PAULA (*rather grimly*) I did. (*Sits on sofa*)

GRONOVA He must be crrr-azy about her. That's how I like to see a man behave. (*Sits left of PAULA*)

PAULA Well, I don't. I take his word for it—it's not only undignified but damned fatuous. And even if it wasn't, she isn't worth it. She's been making great eyes at Copley ever since she arrived here.

GRONOVA He is attractive to some types. To me—no.

PAULA To me—no, too.

Enter EDNA with glass, and memos, etc., she gives the glass to

GRONOVA, *then gives memos to PAULA.*

GRONOVA Thank you very much, my dear. (*Begins to drink*)

EDNA *sits at her desk.*

PAULA (*looking at memos*) Here's news. (*Reads*) "In succession to Brigadier Townson, Sir Reginald Runton, formerly assistant secretary to the Board of Fisheries, has now been appointed deputy-assistant director-general of the English Broadcasting Company." Isn't that nice? I don't think we've had anybody from the Fisheries before. I wonder if he'll notice any difference. (*Looks at GRONOVA, who is staring at her*) What's the matter? Do you know Sir Thimgumty Thing—Sir Reginald Runton?

GRONOVA (*with dramatic air*) That is what I am asking myself.

PAULA And what are you going to reply to yourself?

GRONOVA (*to EDNA*) This Runton—it is not a common name, is it?

EDNA No, it isn't.

GRONOVA (*to PAULA*) How strange it would be if it were him—my first delicious romance. I think I've told you something of it before.

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PAULA I only remember the one who locked you up in his castle in the Dolomites He couldn't have ended up at the Board of Fisheries, could he?

GRONOVA No, of course not He was Austrian, of course But this first one of all—when I was a girl at the Brussels Conservatoire—he was a young Englishman—and we were madly in love and ran away to the Ardennes—it was in June—a lovely June——

EDNA But was his name Runton?

GRONOVA (*rises and crosses to EDNA*) Yes—and he had enchanting blue eyes—and a melting voice

PAULA It must have been a lovely June that year But was he Reginald? Did you call him your Reggie?

GRONOVA That I can't remember You see—he asked me to call him by the name he was known by at school and college—Topsy

PAULA Good lord!

GRONOVA (*dreamily*) He had beautiful fair curling hair but he was jealous of my music There was a terrible scene—oh terrrr-ible! No, no, it couldn't possibly be the same one I'm stupid to-day Why am I so stupid to-day? Why is life like that? (*Sits settee right*)

PAULA Finish your aspirin, Moya, and never mind about life (*Looks at a letter*) Edna—(*round to desk and sits*)—tell London I never had those sea-shanty recordings here Tell them I never touch a sea-shanty—or a negro spiritual—or any of that gorgeous maddening Tzigane stuff, either

EDNA (*taking GRONOVA's glass*) All right (*Rises*) Will you sign the letter returning the script?

PAULA *does* HAYCRAFT *enters mopping his brow delicately*

EDNA *goes out up right* GRONOVA *gets up*

HAYCRAFT (*going to his desk*) I don't see how Tristan can do anything about his programme until all those local people turn up

GRONOVA (*tragically*) I have a feeling they will not turn up

HAYCRAFT Why shouldn't they? They always do

GRONOVA (*moving down to door down right*) I don't know But I have a feeling they won't (*To door*) So everything will be absolutely chaos

Goes out

HAYCRAFT (*solemnly*) It's chaos at the moment all right And I'm afraid our Children's Hour programme isn't very much better It's absurd when we only get it once a fortnight that we can't organise the thing better than this You know—(*down to PAULA*)—Paula, I like doing the Children's Hour

PAULA (*turns to him*) I know you do, Fairfax

HAYCRAFT It's all very well for some of you people to scoff——

PAULA (*who isn't*) I'm not scoffing

HAYCRAFT (*very much himself*) But it's the only thing I really enjoy doing nowadays Do you remember that little series I did—*Friends in Twilight*? Just a few records and readings of selected passages suitable for a friendly twilight hour They were an enormous success A wealthy widow in Torquay wrote asking me to name my own terms——

PAULA What to do?

HAYCRAFT Oh just to go and do some more *Friends in Twilight* readings for her I had to refuse, of course

PAULA Why?

HAYCRAFT Oh—well—(*sits at his desk laughing*)

Enter COPLEY and MARTIN They cross to downstage left

COPLEY (*confidentially*) Now look here, Bradburn, I don't quite understand why you've been sent down here, but of course I'll do what I can to give you everything you want But you must understand, my dear chap, that Miss Limple's now my secretary—a very responsible job—and so you can't possibly commandeer her services So why go on worrying her?

They stop on their return walk

MARTIN I'm not after her services

COPLEY I understood you were

MARTIN I'm not worrying her, as you call it, about that, but about some personal matter You see, I saw a great deal of her in London

COPLEY Oh—did you? She didn't tell me that

MARTIN There are probably a lot of things she doesn't tell you

COPLEY (*after pause, coldly*) Well?

MARTIN (*irritably*) Well what?

COPLEY Is that all you've got to say?

MARTIN What do you want—the story of my life?

COPLEY I think I'm right in saying—you're not engaged to Miss Limple—or anything of that kind?

MARTIN What's anything of that kind? But if you must know, I was infatuated with the girl for months—still am, apparently, or I shouldn't be here—and God knows why I *am* here——

Moves up and sits on piano stool

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

Enter DAISY PUNNET, a girl about twenty, with round red cheeks, round staring eyes, and a startling loud voice, which she never modulates, and a Barseshire accent She comes plump in, then stands and looks about her The others stare at her in surprise

DAISY Is my grand-dad here?

COPLEY Oh—I say—what is this?

DAISY I brought 'im to the door an' said, "Look grand-dad, you stay 'ere a minute while I go across to that shop for a meat pasty for your lunch," an' now I can't find 'im anywhere

COPLEY But—look here—this is an E B C studio, y'know, missie——

DAISY I know it is, mister That's why we're 'ere

HAYCRAFT (*rises and comes down to her right*) Oh—you're in Mr Sprott's programme, are you?

DAISY (*going closer*) That's it Oh—I say—I know your voice

HAYCRAFT (*pleased*) Do you?

DAISY Course I do 'Eard it ever since I can remember Aren't you the announcer, Farfax Haycraft?

HAYCRAFT Well—yes—I am

DAISY (*giving bag to COPLEY and producing autograph book*) Give me your autograph, please It's not for us, but for my cousin Ethel—but I know she'd like yours (*As he signs the book*) I'll bet my grand-dad's wandering round 'ere somewhere (*Takes bag from COPLEY*) He's getting a bit—y'know——

MARTIN *moves down to arm of settee*

—soft, though he'll be a good turn in your programme if you all keep right side of 'im But y'ave to watch him

HAYCRAFT (*the charmer*) Let's see if we can find him, shall we?

He escorts her through door

COPLEY (*moving down left, confidentially to MARTIN*) You were saying?

MARTIN (*down to right of COPLEY*) Oh lord!—I don't know what I was saying Can't you see the idiotic state I'm in? And been in it for weeks—ever since we had that row And the girl isn't even intelligent!

COPLEY (*stuffy*) I've found Dorothy an extremely intelligent girl 'But we're not here to discuss her

MARTIN We're not here to discuss anything

They pace across and up to door then down again

COPLEY Yes, we are, Bradburn Now look here, my dear chap, I can see you're a bit nervy and all that—know how you fellas get—with all this theatrical stuff you have to deal with I'm not going to lecture you Not my style And your personal affairs have nothing to do with me, of course But I'm here to run this studio—

COPLEY *stops near desk*—MARTIN *is left of him*

to see that everybody pulls their weight and is happy about it and all that, and I simply can't have anybody barging in and upsetting everybody—

Enter BRENDA down right

BRENDA (*loudly and cheerfully*) Anybody seen a stop-watch?

COPLEY (*turning*) Never mind about the stop-watch for the moment, Brenda This is Mr Martin Bradburn Until Hilda comes back from her holidays or they send us somebody else, you'd better act as Mr Bradburn's secretary

BRENDA What! With Mr Sprott and Mr Haycraft on my hands already!

COPLEY You'll find Brenda very quick and clever, Bradburn She's good at—er impersonations too, aren't you, Brenda? There now!

Hurries out, leaving MARTIN and BRENDA staring at each other, and PAULA watching, amused

BRENDA (*wistfully*) You wouldn't like to hear one of my impersonations, would you, Mr Bradburn?

MARTIN Good God! He really meant it then

Moves up to HAYCRAFT's desk

BRENDA (*in front of settee, firmly*) Beatrice Lillie

MARTIN *sits on desk and stares at her in horror* BRENDA *begins a quite unconvincing imitation of Beatrice Lillie* PAULA, *taking a stop-watch from her drawer, now takes charge*

PAULA (*below desk to BRENDA*) That'll do, Brenda We're just not receptive this morning But here's the stop-watch I'll never see it again but it's probably worth it Now run

BRENDA *takes it and hurries out* PAULA *sits left of sofa Looks at him*

MARTIN (*groaning, sits edge of desk*) I think I'm going mad Beatrice Lillie and grand-dad and that man Copley—*my dear chap!* And I can't get a glimmer of sense out of Dorothy and until I do I don't know where I am Why did I come here?

PAULA Don't ask me, Bradburn

MARTIN All right, Leeds If you wanted your revenge, take a good look at me now

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PAULA I'm not the vindictive kind, strange as it may seem

MARTIN Is Copley like that all the time?

PAULA Practically all the time

MARTIN Good lord!

PAULA Also, he's considered rather a charmer round here

MARTIN Brenda?

PAULA I don't know about poor Brenda But there are—others

MARTIN (*sits on settee*) No, I don't believe it And don't tell me you aren't vindictive, Leeds

PAULA I'm not Before, I always thought you clever—but insufferable Now I see you're not so clever—but almost sufferable

Enter DOROTHY PAULA sees her MARTIN rises

And this is where I go up to my own office, even if I have to fight my way in through workmen And—Dorothy—

DOROTHY Well?

PAULA (*as she goes out*) Have a heart

Goes

MARTIN (*moving across*) Listen, Dorothy, if you won't come out—

DOROTHY How can I? I'm the studio director's secretary and I've lots to do and—

MARTIN All right, if you can't, you can't But then, for God's sake, let's talk here for a minute

DOROTHY Can't you wait?

MARTIN No, I can't And if you were in anything like the same state of mind that I'm in, you couldn't either Now listen—you remember what you said the last time we saw each other in London?

DOROTHY (*comes to front of desk and puts memo there*) I said a lot of things And so did you And some of them were pretty silly too

MARTIN (*savagely*) All right then, let's stop being pretty silly—as you call it Let's be tough about it, if that's what you want Though God knows what you *do* want—

Behind settee to mike down left

JOE *enters and goes towards mikes, etc* MARTIN *sees him*
Oh—for the love of Pete!

DOROTHY Sh!

MARTIN (*in tense whisper*). Sometimes I think I simply don't see you as a real person at all

DOROTHY (*also in tense whisper*) I shouldn't be surprised at that either

MARTIN It might be just a kind of image I fell in love with I tell myself——

JOE (*shouting at mike*) How's this, Fred? Give me two buzzes if it's okay

Only one buzz comes

MARTIN (*trying again*) I say, I tell myself it's just a beautiful image, planted in my imagination and not a real girl, a person——

JOE (*as before*) Well, give me some more juice, Fred Now listen—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Wednesday, Thursday—the boy stood on the burning deck—is that better?

Two buzzes

Okay, Fred, I'm coming up

On his way out passes the other two below him and smiles at them cheerfully not noticing their tenseness at all

JOE We have to take advantage of these quiet spells, haven't we?

Goes out

DOROTHY If you want to know who's not been real in all this I can tell you—it isn't me, it's you

MARTIN What do you mean by that?

DOROTHY I mean, I got sick and tired of being pulled this way and that way, never allowed to be just myself, with you always arguing and analysing and theorising, until I didn't know where I was

Sits settee

MARTIN I'll bet you know where you are down here all right

DOROTHY (*defiantly*) Yes, I do But just as I'm beginning to settle down again, you come here and want to start all over again——

MARTIN It isn't a question of starting all over again You left me in a hellishly disturbed state of mind—I've not been able to work properly or think straight—so I came down——

DOROTHY To start all over again, only worse than before

MARTIN (*tensely*) I came to discover if I had any meaning for you—and if I had any meaning for you——

LOUD VOICE (*from Speaker*) What are you saying, Joe?

MARTIN (*trying to ignore this*) Look what happened I was crazy about you I couldn't——

VOICE (*from Speaker*) I thought you said you were coming up, Joe

MARTIN (*losing his temper*) Oh—shut up!

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

DOROTHY *has now turned away and is making muffled sounds with her shoulders shaking*

(Turns back to her) Well, there's no need to cry

DOROTHY (turning) I'm not crying I'm laughing

MARTIN (angrily) I used to have a sense of humour too

DOROTHY I never thought you had much

MARTIN (horror-struck) What—me! And you can say that! I suppose this old sea-dog Copley supplies just about your brand of fun

DOROTHY (demurely) Commander Copley says some very amusing things

MARTIN (groaning) Oh!—God help us! But it serves me right, it serves me right (Sits beside DOROTHY Collects himself, solemnly) Now listen, Dorothy One last serious word—

And this is the cue for the entrance of MATTHEW PUNNET, a very ancient be-whiskered rustic who arrives carrying a serpent of great size and blackness His speech is almost unintelligible At first he just comes a step inside

PUNNET 'Marnin, marnin' (Chuckles horribly)

MARTIN *stares at him in horror But there is no escape Now the Ancient comes right in*

Be he the E B C ?

MARTIN What do you say? (Rises and crosses to PUNNET)

PUNNET Be he E B C ?

MARTIN *moves up a little between desk and piano, then comes back*

DOROTHY Yes, this is the E B C studio (Rises)

PUNNET (crossing and sits on settee, chuckling) If he be E B C I be sitting roight ahere awaitin' my tarn to play ould serpent

Chuckles, produces one deep note, and then waits for their applause

DOROTHY I think he's one of the local people for Tristan Sprott's programme \

MARTIN (crosses to HAYCRAFT's desk right) And I think I'm going to have a nervous breakdown

DAISY *rushes in down right, followed by HAYCRAFT*

DAISY (crossing to PUNNET and sits right of him shouting) He's here Where you been, grand-dad?

HAYCRAFT How d'you do, Mr Punnet?

Stands right of settee

PUNNET (*pointing to HAYCRAFT, but to DAISY*) He be mortal image o' Farmer Bates' cowman

HAYCRAFT What does he say?

DAISY (*shouting*) He says you're the image of Bates' cowman

HAYCRAFT (*making the best of it*) And am I?

DAISY No, he's younger than you

PAULA *enters up right and goes to her desk, but notices the PUNNETS, etc., with amusement*

JOE'S VOICE (*from Speaker*) Mr Sprott down there yet?

PUNNET (*rising in alarm*) Be it my tarn to play sarpent already?

DAISY No, sit down and be quiet, grand-dad

HAYCRAFT (*into mike, with great charm*) No, Joe, he's not here I've been looking for him myself Two of his cast have arrived

JOE'S VOICE Okay, I'll wait

PUNNET (*indicating HAYCRAFT*) What's 'e mutterin' about?

DAISY (*humorously*) He's tellin' 'um you're going to 'ave some cider with your dinner

MARTIN (*to DOROTHY*) This is Bedlam Let's go out and have an early lunch

HAYCRAFT *sits on right arm of settee*

DOROTHY (*coldly*) No thanks

MARTIN But we *must* talk

DOROTHY You mean, you must make a scene Besides, I'm busy And I happen to be working for somebody I respect (*Turns and goes towards door*)

MARTIN (*following*) It's our last chance, Dorothy I mean it

But she goes out, and he stays this side of door The others are grouped round old PUNNET, looking at his serpent

PAULA *looks at MARTIN*

Enter TRISTAN, PERCY (to effects box) with scripts, etc., GRONOVA (to piano), BOB (right of piano), HETTY (to chair left), BRENDA (to HAYCRAFT's desk) HAYCRAFT goes behind settee

TRISTAN *sees MARTIN as he crosses him to door*

TRISTAN Hello, old man

MARTIN Hello, Tristan

TRISTAN Excuse me a moment Now just spread yourselves, playmates What sort of rehearsal this'll be, with three of the local cast still missing, God knows, but we'll have some sort of a run-through (*As the others get into their places, he turns to PAULA*

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

and MARTIN) Paula, for the love of Pete, take him away, and then I'll be rid of you both. It's not fair, it's really not fair, you two being here. It simply isn't *done*.

MARTIN I think I'll go and drink myself to death.

PAULA No, you won't. You'll come out and have an early lunch with me. Only don't try and eat yourself to death. (*Rising, to door*)

TRISTAN That's the spirit. Off you go.

MARTIN Nice of you. Though I'll be rotten bad company.

PAULA (*as she moves down with him*) Oh—we'll work up a cheerful little quarrel.

They go out

TRISTAN Are you all ready? I want to try and get some sort of timing on the whole thing—and even though those three aren't here, Miss Punnet and grand-dad can get into it a bit—and we can work in the music and effects. I won't go up into the box yet. But remember next time it'll be light cues. First light for the record, Percy. Second light for you, Fairfax, for the announcement. Third light for you, Moya.

DAISY (*loudly*) What about me and grand-dad?

TRISTAN I'll send up rockets for you two. No, that'll be all right, duckie. Watch your script with one eye and keep the other on grand-dad. Now then——

PERCY starts record. Fades in.

Are you timing it, Brenda?

BRENDA Yes, Mr Sprott.

Fades out.

TRISTAN Fairfax—announcement.

HAYCRAFT (*in his best manner*) "Down Here in Barset"—we present another half-hour of Barsetshire humour, melody, and folklore, in a programme written and produced by Tristan Sprott. It's a beautiful summer night—the men have returned from the hayfields—the door of that friendly old pub *The Brown Cow* stands wide open—"Down Here in Barset".

TRISTAN All right, Moya—Percy—give!

MOYA *begins playing a country tune. PERCY makes noise suggesting bottles and glasses, etc.*

TRISTAN Atmosphere, chaps.

HETTY, BOB, HAYCRAFT, TRISTAN *himself and even PERCY and BRENDA* laugh and chatter in a rather stagey style. *In the middle*

of this, there is a queer deep note from PUNNET's serpent Music stops

(*Shrieking*) No, no, no No serpent yet The old boy's not made his entrance yet

DAISY (*loudly*) Y'aven't to start playin' yet, grand-dad I'll tell you when

PUNNET (*unintelligibly*) Ef oi come 'ere to play sarpent, oi wants to play sarpent

TRISTAN What does he say?

DAISY He says if he comes 'ere to play his serpent he want to play his serpent

TRISTAN (*shouting*) Quite right, grand-dad—you've got temperament—but wait until the proper time and then you can blow your head off Start, again everybody

More laughter and chatter, as before

BOB (*in Barset style*) 'Nother point o' coider, Rose Oi saw your young man over boi Jenkins' twenty-acre

HETTY (*same style*) He's no young man o' moine, Charley Bragg isn't—not since Michaelmas Fair

BOB Didn't buy ee a praper fairing, oi'll be bound, Rose

DAISY (*in loud, wooden tone, rise and step down*) Good evenin' all! Is moi grand-dad 'ere?

TRISTAN No, no, no, duckie You're much too soon

PUNNET (*intelligible*) But oi be 'ere, girl

DAISY No, grand-dad It's what I say in the piece we're doing

TRISTAN But you were much too early And don't say it like that either Do it more like this (*Very rural but also very bright*) "Good evenin' all! Is moi grand-dad 'ere?"

DAISY (*exactly as before*) Good evenin' all! Is moi grand-dad 'ere?

TRISTAN Yes, a bit better, duckie But I'll have to rehearse you later (DAISY *sits*) Now then, Bob, back to your fairing line

BOB Didn't buy ee a praper fairing, oi'll be bound, Rose

HAYCRAFT (*surprisingly*) Oi 'eard tell on that tew, Garge

HETTY What yew tew 'eard tell on 'at isn't trew would fill the Barsetshire News onny Friday What's for yew, Muster Caxton?

BOB (*in different voice, very deep*) Pint of old an' mild, Miss Nancy

HETTY Yes, Muster Caxton (*Pour*) Would yew be giving us a song to-noight, Muster Caxton?

HAYCRAFT We do be expectin' your old 'ay-makin' song to-noight, Muster Caxton

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

BOB (*as GARGE again*) Oi'll never forget the first toime oi ever 'eard that 'ay-makin' song—dang my buttons! (*Much laughter*) Woi, look oo's 'ere! Young Cherry Gooseman

DAISY (*rise*) Good evenin' all Is moi grand-dad 'ere?

Collapse of TRISTAN

BOB (*as GARGE*) Naow, yer grand-dad's not 'ere

HETTY (*as ROSE*) An' that's where yew be wrong, again, Garge Ol' Gooseman's 'ere He's asleep in the corner there

HAYCRAFT Woi so 'e be An' only man in all Barset as can still play the ould serpent

DAISY Moi grand-dad was the foinest serpent player in the whole o' Barset——

TRISTAN (*rises to knees*) Not quite so loud, duckie—but a bit brighter You see, you're frightfully proud of the fact that your grand-dad was the finest serpent player in the whole of Barset It's kept your family going for the last sixty years

DAISY Me mother won't let 'im play it (*To old PUNNET*) 'Ere, grand-dad, wake up! Y'ave to play in a minute

TRISTAN Let's have it again, duckie Moi grand-dad——

PUNNET (*loudly and angrily*) Oi be woide awake naow, girl Oi'll gi'ee a beltin' ef oi've any more o' your sauce——

DAISY No, that's what it says in the piece, grand-dad

PUNNET starts playing, to the sound of cheers and noises of glasses, etc from PERCY TRISTAN is beating time with one hand and wiping his brow with the other The curtain comes swiftly down on the collapse of TRISTAN

ACT II

As before It is now the middle of the afternoon

At rise, PERCY KING is playing some dashing swing, and BRENDA is standing near, admiring it and him and dancing They have the studio to themselves This performance is continued until the audience has stopped banging down the seats It is then brought to a fine slapdash conclusion PERCY breaks the music with a little dance

BRENDA (*coming down centre*) I think you're marvellous

PERCY (*who does too*) Well, it's a gift reelly—(*rises*)—only you gotta practise as well, see? I nearly got into a programme—jus' before last Christmas it was—only they were frightened of over-runnin' so they cut me out

BRENDA I'll bet you get your chance soon, Percy

PERCY I'll bet I do (*Condescending a little*) An' I'll bet you do too, Alice

BRENDA (*like lightning*) Brenda

PERCY (*unembarrassed*) Brenda—that's right

BRENDA You an' your Alices'

PERCY 'Ere, hand out one of your impersonations

BRENDA All right Who shall I do?

PERCY Don't tell me Let me guess—see?

BRENDA (*doubtfully, coming to front of settee*) I've never done 'em that way before They never do 'em that way on the stage They always tell you first who it is

PERCY (*comes down and leans on desk*) Never mind—let's try it this way Go on

BRENDA (*changing into somebody not BRENDA, but God knows who*) "Good evening, my darling You *are* my darling still, aren't you—my darling? Tired? No, I could dance the night away I feel inspired, darling No, it isn't champagne—I only had the tiniest sip—it's love and life—life and love——"

PERCY It's swell Honestly, I wouldn't have known it was you If I'd come in at the door when you was doing it, I wouldn't 'ave known it was you

BRENDA Yes, but who was it?

PERCY Jessie Matthews?

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BRENDA (*scornfully*) No, not a bit like her (*Sits settee*)

PERCY Gertrude Lawrence?

BRENDA No, I never seen her

PERCY Ginger Rogers?

BRENDA (*showing signs of distress now*) No—don't be silly How could it be Ginger Rogers?

Telephone She has to answer it

Yes, this is the E B C Who? *What emperor?*

She listens bewildered, but at that moment COMMANDER COPLEY enters down right, followed by DOROTHY

COPLEY What's this? Anything for me?

BRENDA (*putting hand over receiver*) Yes It's somebody complaining about something (*Up to piano*)

COPLEY (*he goes and takes telephone from her*) Commander Copley here—regional director Oh yes Certainly, we're only too glad to be corrected yes, I'll pass it on with pleasure, sir I see Now let me get this straight, sir—Maximilian did not assume the title of Emperor Elect until 1508, and *not* in 1506—as our speaker suggested Thank you No, I'm much obliged and I'll forward the correction to the proper quarter at once
Good afternoon

Puts down telephone, and gives DOROTHY a whimsical smile

Make a note of that, Dorothy, and send it along to Talks at Radio House I haven't the foggiest what it's all about

DOROTHY (*admiringly*) I don't know how you've the patience

COPLEY (*smiling*) That's one of the things you learn in the Service These things come in jolly useful And that's where these chaps who've had no proper training—these temperamental Johnnies—fall down

PERCY Gracie Fields?

BRENDA (*suddenly furious*) No, you fathead—and I believe you're doing it on purpose

PERCY (*staggered*) What me? Why, I only——

BRENDA (*angrily*) Oh shut up!

She hurries out and collides with BOB DINTY

Mind where you're going—clumsy (*She bangs out*)

PERCY Boy!

BOB (*who is gloomy*) What have you been doing to her?

PERCY Nothing She suddenly flares up——

BOB (*gloomily*) That's women, my lad You're just beginning to get a glumpse of it They get worse as they get older (*He sits down heavily in settee*)

PERCY I've seen plenty of it My Sis—

BOB (*cutting in*) You've seen nothing yet, my lad Take it from me They get worse as they get older And it isn't their insides They've got insides like horses

PERCY My Sis—

BOB (*cutting in*) Yes, like horses Eat and drink anything

PERCY Horses can't eat and drink anything

BOB Don't argue, my lad I'm in no mood for an argument

Enter FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT, who goes to his desk

PERCY What about that Children's Hour stuff, Mr Haycraft?

HAYCRAFT Have a look in the basement Joe Cossart might remember

PERCY *goes out* HAYCRAFT *now notices* BOB's *gloom*

What's the matter, Bob? Worrying about having two programmes to-day?

BOB Programmes? Not me Give me work, old boy, and I'm happy I like work—live for it Every good actor does Old Thorburn—you remember old Thorburn's Shakespearean Company?—I was with him for five years—well, old Thorburn used to say, "Bob, you're a glutton for work, boy—I'll say that about you" There's no work here, Fairfax It's child's play to a man who's been brought up in repertory No, it's not work but the other thing that's got me down, to-day

HAYCRAFT What other thing?

BOB Well, what do you think?—women

HAYCRAFT Oh, I see

BOB You go to your digs hoping for a nice quiet lunch on a busy day—and what happens? Hell breaks loose And why? Only one answer—the women

HAYCRAFT What women? Who was there besides Hetty?

BOB My wife

HAYCRAFT Oh—I say! She turned up then?

BOB Yes, she does every month or two, just to see how I'm getting on She knows about Hetty and me, of course, but that doesn't stop her coming. Embarrassing I call it, but nothing seems to embarrass women so long as their clothes don't start falling down If I was married to a man who was living with another woman,

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would I keep turning up for lunch? Of course I wouldn't—and neither would you, old man. But *they* do, think nothing of it. And you ought to have seen the way they walked into that duck we had, both Hetty and the wife.

HAYCRAFT Didn't they leave any for you to-night?

BOB I'll be lucky if there's a leg. Well, the first half of the lunch, while they're wolfing the duck, the wife and Hetty are taking cracks at each other all the time—you know how women are—"My dear, you're looking so tired"—"No, he never cared for your acting, did he, dear?"—like a couple of talking cats round that duck. Till I got fed up and told 'em I'd like a bit of peace and quiet. That settled it. They rounded on me, then, both of 'em at once. I was a fine one to talk! You know. And no delicacy, no tact, old man, about the situation at all. Out comes everything, with me to blame all through, of course. In the end I simply couldn't stick it and walked straight out on the pair of 'em—round to the *Lion*. So—for God's sake, old man, don't leave Uncle Bob alone with Auntie Hetty this afternoon, else your Children's Hour is going to sound like a dog-fight.

Enter TRISTAN, looking rather wild, with present in box wrapped up

TRISTAN My mother's just telephoned from Leamington. She's met a theosophical Indian there who remembers her as the favourite concubine of a Chinese Emperor who flourished about two-thousand B.C. (*Crosses to settee and sits*) No good'll come of that. Before the week's out he'll be borrowing his fare to Bombay.

BOB (*to HAYCRAFT*) You see. Nothing but trouble with 'em.

HAYCRAFT (*to TRISTAN*) Bob's had a bad time with his women-folk at lunch.

TRISTAN (*starting to untie parcel*) It's worse though when they use the telephone for all their most fantastic and revolting statements. I think the girls at the exchange listen in and then tell all bona-fide subscribers. That's why, wherever I go, I hear the unpleasant sound of only half-suppressed giggles. I ought to telephone myself to somebody, but I can't remember to whom about what. (*Has untied parcel and taken out envelope, flowers, scarf*) What extraordinary things people do send for presents. (*Looks at envelope*) Oh, Fairfax, this is for you.

HAYCRAFT *takes present and puts scarf round his neck*

HAYCRAFT I see that Sir Reginald Runton, late of the Board of Fisheries, has just been appointed our deputy-assistant director-general.

TRISTAN Stop it, Fairfax. You sound just as if you're reading

the choicest news of the Baldwin Government You'll have us all in Westminster Abbey in a minute if you're not careful That's what wrecked you, Fairfax You've never been able to get Westminster Abbey out of your voice (*Rise and move up stairs*) I must rehearse those monstrous Punnets some time this afternoon Then there are the other three rural druids to arrive

BOB You know, Tristan old man, I've never understood why you're down here doing these rustic Basset programmes

TRISTAN (*at top of stairs*) For the same reason that Dick Hodge, who's really a farmer, is up in town doing light sophisticated metropolitan programmes like "Cafe Society" and—(*down stairs*)—"Company at Claridge's" If I'd turned up to Radio House covered with hayseed and reeking of manure, I'd have been in town yet, eating *supreme de volaille* and drinking *Montrachet*

Enter EDNA

Oh, Edna, do something for me, will you?

EDNA Yes, what is it?

TRISTAN That's the trouble, I can't remember Why do I think fish comes into it?

EDNA Do you want some fish?

TRISTAN Good God—no! Fairfax was announcing about fish That's it Sir Reginald Thing, our new deputy-assistant D G, was discovered in the Board of Fisheries (*Giving string to FAIRFAX*) That's yours "Put those mackerel away," they said, "and try broadcasting Have you ever done any? No? Good! Interested in drama, music, entertainment, news, popular talks? No? Splendid! You're just what we want" Where's Paula?

EDNA I don't know I came out to see, because a long telegram's just come for her

TRISTAN Don't tell me what it's all about

EDNA I'm not going to

TRISTAN That's right—let me guess They want her to go to Sheffield and produce one of those stark documentaries *Steel! Iron! Copper! Lead! Humph?*

EDNA No, it's nothing to do with E B C business It's private

TRISTAN (*lies on settee*) I don't like all this secrecy No private life here

EDNA You mustn't be inquisitive I can't tell you any more

Enter GRONOVA, looking very agitated

GRONOVA A most extraordinary thing has happened to me I'm terribly upset.

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BOB (*rising*) This is where I go (*Crossing to door*)

GRONOVA Why do you say that? It has nothing to do with you
Why are you so rude?

BOB Because I've had enough of women being upset for one afternoon I'll be in the little talks studio, Tristan, if you want me

Goes out GRONOVA *still does her agitated act Up to piano and down to desk*

TRISTAN (*severely*) It would serve you jolly well right, Moya, if we just didn't ask you what was the matter Let's not Now as I was saying—

HAYCRAFT (*a kindly soul*) No, we want to know what happened
Go on, Moya

GRONOVA (*dramatically to FAIRFAX*) It was a voice I overheard

TRISTAN That'll do, Moya We can't have anybody in our drama department being as dramatic as that

GRONOVA I had to call at the hair-dresser's to arrange an appointment—

EDNA (*interested*) Which one? Maison Binns?

GRONOVA (*to EDNA*) Maison Binns, yes Just inside there is a thin partition one side for Ladies, one for Gentlemen—

TRISTAN Always a decent arrangement, I think

GRONOVA I am in the Ladies' side

TRISTAN Good!

GRONOVA making my appointment—when I hear a voice I hear it through the partition, from the gentlemen's side This voice, it is refusing a shampoo "No," it is saying, "no shampoo this afternoon, thank you," it is saying And at once I know this voice I know it I know it, I know it But at once I know it

TRISTAN (*with solemn irony*) Ah—you knew it, then?

GRONOVA Yes, I am telling you—but at once, I knew it This voice—it was part of my life I could hardly wait for the stupid girl to book the appointment I hurried to the door—(*Runs to door Opens it*)—to see the man who owned that voice But there was no one. (*Closes door*) He had gone

TRISTAN Oh what a shame!

GRONOVA It *is* a shame, because I cannot remember whose voice it was I heard—but I know I *know* that it belongs to my past My heart trembled when I heard it. And now I must wonder and puzzle my head all day I am—*haunted*—by it. I must go out again (*Crossing towards door*)

HAYCRAFT Don't be so haunted that you forget you're helping us with the Children's Hour to-day

GRONOVA No—of course not—I am always conscientious—my work comes first—but I must go out again—I feel stifled here—

Goes out

HAYCRAFT She evidently heard somebody she once knew

TRISTAN Think so, Fairfax? I got that idea too Edna, I've remembered something Ring up Philip in Manchester—and ask him to put those two Irish recordings on the train

As EDNA is going out, DOROTHY enters, with some memos, one of which she gives to TRISTAN before giving the others to HAYCRAFT, and busies herself at desk centre

What have you brought us this time, Dorothy? (*Looks at memo and reads*) "Owing to copyright difficulties, until further notice no use must be made in any programme of *Hot-pants Hortense* Don't forget that, Fairfax That'll cramp your twilight hours a bit (*Calling her back as she is going out*) Dorothy! (*Rises and moves to right*)

DOROTHY (*turning*) Yes

TRISTAN Come here, mavourneen There's something that's worrying me (*As she, rather reluctantly, comes to right of him*) My spies are telling me that young Martin Bradburn—as proud and high-stepping a cavalier as ever turned the knobs on a producer's panel—got himself sent down here to continue to pay his court to you, my haughty beauty (*In mock bad actor's voice*) Tell me, girl, is't true?

DOROTHY Don't you think you ought to mind your own business?

TRISTAN Good Lord—no! I never heard of such a loathsome idea Come now, tell me and Uncle Fairfax the truth

DOROTHY (*indignantly*) Well, if you must know, Martin Bradburn's been behaving like an idiot And I've told him so It was all off when I came down here, and now he comes charging down to try and start it all over again

TRISTAN Do you want me to understand, Dorothy, that the fact that he came down here specially to see you really annoys you?

DOROTHY Yes it does It makes me look so silly

TRISTAN No ordinary man, mind you—but quite a distinguished producer, distinguished in the theatre before he came to the E B C, a man who will go a long way—a man—

DOROTHY (*cutting in, impatiently*) Oh—what's that got to do with it?

TRISTAN (*with mock severity*) Dorothy, my famous insight into

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feminine psychology tells me that if that's your attitude, you must have gone and fallen for somebody else

DOROTHY (*rather embarrassed*) Oh—don't be silly

Goes out hastily TRISTAN *follows her round*

TRISTAN (*giggles*) Damn nuisance that! It's obvious Copley's her man, not Bradburn

HAYCRAFT Yes, but why is it a nuisance?

TRISTAN Because if Bradburn had been happy here with his Dorothy, I was going to apply to get back to London, where I belong and where they might have allowed me to do some real broadcasting. Strange as it may seem, I didn't join the E B C because I had nowhere to go, but because I believed in Radio and cared for it. It's a hell of a handicap of course, and I think it was that and not the fact that I was drunk and disorderly in the sight of the director of programmes—that got me sentenced to these salt mines

HAYCRAFT (*rising, indignantly*) I wish you people wouldn't talk of this station as if it were a prison or something. It's as much part of the broadcasting scheme as Radio House. And I'd *rather* be here than in London—

TRISTAN Uncle Fairfax, Uncle Fairfax, we're alone. Nobody's listening. You needn't put on that how-happy-are-the-regions act for me. You're just as much an exile as I am.

HAYCRAFT Nonsense! They're only giving me a rest.

TRISTAN Oh—quite, quite, quite. And when the E B C get back to Westminster Abbey, they'll be asking for you. Where's Paula Leeds?

Enter MARTIN, looking gloomy

Hello, you look a mite grim.

MARTIN I feel a mite grim. Where's Paula?

HAYCRAFT (*going to door*) I thought you and she lunched together.

MARTIN We did. But we split up an hour or two ago. She was friendly, and it was a good lunch she gave me, but somehow we couldn't get going together.

TRISTAN (*as HAYCRAFT goes out, crossing legs on desk*) Now why doesn't Paula give *me* lunch? I'm unusually good at being given lunch to. Did you have a row?

MARTIN No, but we didn't tick over properly. My fault probably.

TRISTAN Your fault certainly. Paula wouldn't ask anybody to lunch just to start a quarrel.

MARTIN I'm worried—about various things.

TRISTAN You realise now, of course, that you were an idiot to come down here?

MARTIN Yes, that's fairly obvious

TRISTAN If I hadn't a singularly noble nature—(*moving to sofa and sitting right of MARTIN*)—I'd try to sell you the idea of staying here, so that I could get back to London. But your need is greater than mine. (*As MARTIN sits down and looks dejected*) Why don't you ask Copley, who doesn't want you here anyhow, to ring up Radio House and see if you can't go back? Say the place is bad for your sciatica. I've never tried them with sciatica, but I've an idea that our administration department would react very favourably towards it. It sounds such a respectable complaint.

MARTIN (*gloomily*) I suppose I've made a fool of myself but it isn't just that.

TRISTAN Can't be. (*Leaning on MARTIN'S shoulder*) I rather like making a fool of myself. At least it's making *something* of yourself.

MARTIN If that was all, I wouldn't mind. But—oh, I dunno—but nothing's *right*. And I can't put my finger on what it is that's making everything seem wrong. Good Lord—I'm beginning to sound like Hamlet.

TRISTAN He put it better, I think. But you might try going on a blind. It removes the inhibitions, and then up from the grimy old unconscious comes the dirty dripping truth. Try a blind, Bradburn. I'll join you to-night as soon as I've taken the radio customers "down here in Barset".

MARTIN I don't like drinking on principle——

TRISTAN Well, pretend it's for fun then——

MARTIN But if I still feel like this to-night, it'll probably mean a blind.

TRISTAN Let me know. But it's a pity you don't get on with Paula.

MARTIN (*moves down, lifts TRISTAN up and sits left of settee*) Well, I don't. Never did. I suppose I don't like that type.

TRISTAN She isn't a type. As a matter of fact, she's a darling—and about the best we've got in the E B C.

MARTIN There's something about her—and always was—that irritates me.

TRISTAN (*considering him*) I think it's probably because she's very intelligent. You're the kind of British male who doesn't want women to be intelligent.

MARTIN (*indignantly*) Now what d'you think I am, Sprott?

TRISTAN I didn't say *you* weren't intelligent. I said you might

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be the kind of British male who doesn't want his women to be intelligent

MARTIN Yes, I heard, I heard, I heard (*With sudden change of tone*) My God!—you might be right too Perhaps I don't like them intelligent If so, then this *does* serve me right

He considers himself in dismay, while TRISTAN stares at him
PAULA *now enters and both men stare hard at her in silence*

PAULA (*going over to desk*) Hello! Nobody been asking for me, I suppose? (*She then notices their stares and silence*) Why these fixed stares, gentlemen?

TRISTAN Bradburn's staring at you because somewhere at the back of his innocent mind the dawn is breaking *I'm* staring to remind you of a recent memo that says senior members of the staff must try to keep regular office hours Paula, you've taken about four hours for lunch

PAULA No, hairdresser's, mostly

TRISTAN (*interested*) Maison Binns?

PAULA No, the other one Betty and Phyllis Ye Olde English

MARTIN (*rousing himself*) I must see Copley

Goes out

TRISTAN He's trying to get back to London (*Moves to left end of settee*)

PAULA What about his Dorothy?

TRISTAN He's recovering

PAULA About time too! (*Moves up and down between desk and piano*)

TRISTAN Do you like him?

PAULA He's a damn good producer Not only for us, but he was very good in the theatre too

TRISTAN I know that, but do you like him?

PAULA Not much

TRISTAN Do you find there's something about him that irritates you? (*Pats settee for her to sit beside him*)

PAULA (*sits settee right*) Yes That's very clever of you, Tristan There always was something about him that irritated me

TRISTAN I guessed that The trouble is, I don't think he likes intelligent women

PAULA I'm not surprised He's that type

TRISTAN No, he isn't a type As a matter of fact, he's really rather a darling—and of course about as good as we've got in the E.B.C

PAULA He can't do with me, can he?

TRISTAN He *thinks* he can't But secretly—he's fascinated

PAULA Oh—rubbish!

TRISTAN And in the same secret way *you're* fascinated too

PAULA (*rises and crosses to desk centre and sits*) Good lord!—what rot you talk!

TRISTAN You see—you're beginning to say "Good lord" just as he does Always a sure sign

COPLEY *enters, carrying his hat and coat*

COPLEY (*putting on coat*) Bradburn wants to go back to London now—doesn't seem to know his own mind, that chap—and of course I've no objection, so long as he can make it right with Radio House So I've left him trying to get through to talk to 'em

TRISTAN Quite right, Commander It's up to him

COPLEY By the way, a bloke I knew in the Service may blow in this afternoon, so if you should find anybody asking for me, tell him I'll be back in half an hour or so and keep him amused

PAULA How do we amuse him?

TRISTAN We could tell him a thing or two about broadcasting

COPLEY Good idea! The old boy knows nothing about it, and he'll probably feel he's having the time of his life I'll be back in time for our Children's Hour programme

Goes out

TRISTAN (*imitating COPLEY*) I'll be back in time for the Children's Hour programme Why should he be back in time for the Children's Hour programme? It'll go on just the same without him

PAULA Just doesn't want to miss it, I suppose A little good clean fun with the kiddies

TRISTAN (*shaking his head, coming down to edge of piano*) You're bitter, Miss Leeds, you're very bitter Have you ever asked yourself if you're showing a cheerful spirit of co-operation and pulling your weight in the boat?

PAULA No, I don't talk to myself like that

Enter EDNA, with note-book

Oh—Edna—any messages for me?

EDNA Yes A telegram (*Above desk*)

TRISTAN (*crosses to desk interested*) Oh yes—that telegram

EDNA It's private—not E B C business

PAULA (*not unpleasantly*) In that case, Edna, we just wait until Mr Sprott goes (*She smiles at him*) He'll be going any minute now

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TRISTAN (*with mock dignity*) Oh—well, if that's how you feel—of course I'll go I have my pride By gosh, I have my Punnets too And I warn you that when I find 'em, I'm going to rehearse 'em in here

PAULA Why can't you take them into Two?

TRISTAN (*as he goes*) Because the old man would think it was all different when I brought him back in here Must get him house-trained to this studio

Goes out

EDNA (*with note-book, sits*) I took this telegram over the phone and I haven't copied it out yet

PAULA (*a light rebuke*) Too busy?

EDNA No, only I couldn't copy it on the machine up there without Dorothy or Brenda knowing all about it—and so——

PAULA Yes, of course Well, read it

EDNA (*reading*) "Play accepted by Harland who is enthusiastic (*PAULA rises and moves round to read*) stop good terms for immediate production West End with option New York production next season stop contract in post but could you come up as soon as possible discuss cast etc stop any ideas for producer stop congratulations Blake" You'd like me to type this out, wouldn't you?

PAULA (*excitedly*) I'd like you to copy it in gold letters about two feet high My goodness, Edna! (*Moves to couch*) Harland's taken my play *My play*, Edna!

EDNA I know I'm so glad Isn't it exciting?

PAULA Exciting? It's frightening Harland 'll drop down dead (*Sits couch*) Or perhaps Blake—he's the agent, Edna—has simply gone mad What does it say? Good terms! Immediate production West End! New York next season! Will I come up as soon as possible? Will I be found waiting on Harland's doorstep? And what was that about a producer? (*Back to EDNA*)

EDNA (*referring to note-book*) "Any ideas for a producer?"

PAULA (*thinking hard, sits on settee*) Any ideas for a producer? How extraordinary that is!

EDNA Why is it extraordinary?

PAULA I'm sorry, Edna—I feel almost ready to tell you the whole story of my life, but I just can't tell you why that particular thing's extraordinary You'll just have to take my word for it Yes, I'll do it.

EDNA Do what? Or is that a secret too?

PAULA Yes, that's a secret too (*Crosses to EDNA*) In fact, the

whole thing must be Listen, Edna—please don't tell anybody just yet Really, not a soul I've a special reason for asking

EDNA Yes, Miss Leeds, I promise And I haven't told anybody about this telegram I really am good at keeping secrets

PAULA I'm sure you're wonderful at it

EDNA If you become a famous dramatist, you'll have to have a secretary, won't you?

PAULA I get the idea, and I'm sure you'd do very nicely But I must point out that I'm an appallingly long way from anything that remotely resembles a famous dramatist But—gosh!—Harland's taken my play—hasn't he?

EDNA Yes, and I believe it'll be a success

PAULA You don't know anything about it

EDNA I do I read it one afternoon when you were out It was in the drawer of your desk

PAULA Well—of all the cheek!—

EDNA Oh, but I thought it was frightfully good You don't mind, do you?

PAULA How can I if you think it's frightfully good But remember—not a whisper to anybody—for all kinds of good reasons

EDNA I promise Do you think I could come to the first night? If I could get leave I could—

As door opens

PAULA (*hastily*) Sh-sh! (*Moves up*)

HETTY *comes in, looking rather agitated*

HETTY Is Bob anywhere about?

PAULA No Do you want him?

HETTY No, I'd like him to keep right away from me (*To desk, looking at PAULA curiously*) What's the matter with you? You're very excited about something

PAULA I get like this sometimes I'm a smouldering volcano really

HETTY You haven't gone and fallen in love, have you?

PAULA No, I haven't And you don't sound as if you recommend it

HETTY Recommend it! I wish they'd give me the air for half an hour sometime just to tell girls the truth about this love business But then they wouldn't believe me

PAULA What's poor Bob been doing this time? (*Sits arm of settee*)

HETTY (*disgusted*) Poor Bob! You wouldn't say "poor Bob" if you'd seen the way he went on at lunch to-day It would have served

him right if I'd said to his wife, "There he is Take him And take him a long way off while you're about it"

PAULA But was his wife lunching with you?

HETTY Yes, she turns up now and again, just to see how we're getting on And of course Bob thinks it's terrible He's very conventional, for all his talk (*To EDNA*) I don't know that you ought to hear all this (*Sits at desk centre*)

EDNA I'll go if you want me to, Hetty, but everybody here knows all about you and Bob

HETTY I suppose they do I must say, Paula, I don't blame you now for keeping so close, as if nothing ever happened to you

PAULA Nothing, in your sense, ever does

HETTY What about those long week-end leaves you're always taking?

PAULA Ridiculous as it seems, I spend them at home with my mother

HETTY Ah!—if I'd known at first what I know now, I'd be telling everybody I spent all my spare time at home with my mother But I was telling you about lunch to-day (*Starts to knit*) Well, to begin with it wasn't so bad Maisie—that's Bob's wife—I've known her for years—we were on tour together for years—well, Maisie as usual points out all the defects in the digs, and tells us how sorry she is for us having to stay here in Barset, and be working for the E B C, and of course as usual I keep the ball in play, so that she gets back as good as she gives—and really we're all getting on nicely——

PAULA (*laughing*) Having a lovely cosy time, I'd say

HETTY Well, dear, you know how it is She may be Bob's wife—but I know plenty about her—a lot more than Bob does—and she knows I do—so she knows too she hasn't too much room to talk—and it's all *right*—if Bob'd let it alone I didn't want her there, specially when we were having duck and there wasn't too much of it—God knows what ducks do with themselves once you put 'em in an oven! (*Business with tape measure*) And of course Bob, who wasn't having any, not till to-night, was watching every mouthful she ate—but really we were getting along nicely if Bob had just kept quiet

PAULA (*amused*) Poor Bob!

HETTY There's no "poor Bob" about it All he'd to do was to keep quiet. But suddenly, he starts on the pair of us Women were this, that and the other! We ought to be ashamed of ourselves! No delicacy or tact or something! All this from him, of all people, with his wife—and *me*—together there looking at him Well, I wasn't going to stand that—and neither was Maisie, though if she'd kept

out of it, we'd have done better Then the next minute, up he jumps, bangs on the table—and upsets the gravy dish all over a clean table-cloth—shouts at the top of his voice, like a madman, and goes tearing out And then, of course, Maisie tries to tell me that I don't know how to handle him I'm not going to take that from her, of course, when he was never sober the last years she had him and couldn't remember his lines—so I tell her a few things—and—

She breaks off because BOB enters hastily

BOB (*not noticing HETTY at first*) Oh—I say— (*Breaks off*)

HETTY (*icily*) Well, what *do* you say, Bob Dinty?

BOB (*stopping near door*) Nothing—to you

HETTY (*going forward*) Now you just listen to me

BOB I've something better to do

HETTY (*hastily and angrily*) Oh—no—you haven't—

As she darts forward, he hastily leaves, and she goes after him

PAULA Let's hope they settle all that before they turn into Aunt Hetty and Uncle Bob this afternoon, or the kiddies may smell a rat

EDNA Do you want to send a reply to that telegram?

PAULA (*rises*) Yes, I've been thinking about that

EDNA prepares to take down the telegram

“Blake Play Agency”—no, he has a telegraphic address—yes, it's “Blaplay, Dover Street, W 1” Wait a minute now “Your exciting telegram received—” (*Breaks off*)

Enter JOE, bringing with him old PUNNET and DAISY The old man has no serpent with him, and looks very sleepy and very cross

As JOE takes them across the studio—

JOE (*as he brings them in*) Come along, please

PAULA Upstairs, Edna, the circus is here

They go out JOE almost forcibly puts PUNNET into chair at PAULA's desk

JOE Now you're going to be all right there, and I'll find Mr Sprott for you, and you won't have to worry any more

As old PUNNET apparently sinks into a coma

Doesn't seem very lively, does he? What's the matter with him?

DAISY (*loudly*) He'd two pints o' cider with 'is dinner—an' me mother told me not to let 'im 'ave any—but soon as my back's turned, 'e gets it—'e's that artful An' now 'e's testy as a weasel—an' gone an' lost 'is sarpent into the bargain (*Shouting at the old man*) But where did yer leave it, grand-dad?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

Old PUNNET opens one eye, looks malevolently at DAISY and JOE and makes a deep gurring noise

DAISY It's all right yer saying *gurr*, but yer've gone an' lost yer ould sarpent, an' yer no good to the E B C without yer sarpent, grand-dad

JOE (*crosses at back to left end couch*) Percy's looking for it He's a bright lad, Percy He'll find it Now you wait here

As he starts to move settee, SIR REGINALD RUNTON enters, very hesitantly He is a tallish, slightish, very gentlemanly fellow in his fifties, with a timid but precise manner A senior Civil Servant clean out of his depth He punctuates his phrases with a little apologetic cough

SIR REGINALD (*to DAISY*) Oh—I say—could I see Commander Copley? (*DAISY giggles*)

JOE (*coming forward*) What name, sir?

SIR REGINALD Oh—er—Sir Reginald Runton

JOE I beg your pardon

SIR REGINALD (*rather surprised*) Not at all, not at all

JOE (*after a pause*) I mean, I didn't catch the name

SIR REGINALD Oh—sorry (*Distinctly*) Sir Reginald Runton

JOE (*who has never heard of him*) I see Well, Commander Copley's out just now, but he'll be back soon (*Moving away to left end of couch*)

SIR REGINALD (*looking round helplessly*) Well—er—I suppose I could—er—wait somewhere (*About to sit*)

JOE We're a bit short of space just now—and we've got a transmission in here soon—oh, will you give me a hand?

SIR REGINALD Oh—yes of course (*He does so*)

JOE So, as Commander Copley won't be long, what I'd suggest is that you have a walk round and then come back again in about a quarter of an hour (*PUNNET gives loud snore*)

SIR REGINALD Yes—of course—probably the best thing under the circumstances—

As they move together slowly towards door—

You—er—on the staff here?

JOE Yes, engineer

SIR REGINALD (*with affable condescension*) Job all right, eh?

JOE No, lousy.

They go out DAISY watches them and now shakes the old man, who has dropped his hat

DAISY (*picking up hat and giving it to him*) Grand-dad, yer havin' something terrible—an' what me mother'll say if she finds out, I don't know Wake up an' behave proper!

PUNNET (*waking up*) Grrr! Wo! be we a-sittin' 'ere girl? Oi want to go 'ome

DAISY 'Ow can we go home when yer promised to play for the E B C ?

PUNNET (*suddenly and viciously awake*) 'Od rabbit un! Oi says 'Od rabbit un—E B C an' all

Enter TRISTAN and stares at PUNNET

'Od rabbit 'em all!

TRISTAN (*comes over to DAISY and bends over to look at PUNNET*) What's he saying?

DAISY He's just a-swearin' an' carryin' on something terrible—(*TRISTAN crosses to left of desk, sits on arm of sofa and looks at PUNNET*)—the silly old turnip He's full o' cider an' gone an' lost 'is serpent

TRISTAN *kneels down on sofa and leans on desk and looks at old PUNNET anxiously The old man is beginning to doze off again, but manages to stare at TRISTAN with one malevolent eye*

PUNNET (*only half intelligibly*) 'Tisn't 'im as be image o' Farmer Bates' cowman

TRISTAN What does he say?

DAISY (*loudly*) He says it isn't you that's the image o' Farmer Bates' cowman

TRISTAN Well, that's something, but it doesn't get us very far Where do we go from there?

PUNNET (*with startling violence*) It be all slummerty-wummerty—ay, masters—slummerty-wummerty! (*Relapses into coma again after this effort*)

TRISTAN Did he say "slummerty-wummerty"?

DAISY Yes, it's a saying of 'is when he loses 'is silly ould temper

TRISTAN (*in comic despair*) He's right too It is slummerty-wummerty (*Suddenly, direct to DAISY, solemnly*) Just go down there—(*pointing*)—and try the opening line "Good evenin' all! Is mo! grand-dad 'ere?"

DAISY (*going, as in Act I*) "Good evenin' all! Is mo! grand-dad 'ere?"

TRISTAN (*in despair*) Honestly, I don't know if that's any better or not, duckie I just don't know It's all slummerty-wummerty with me now

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

DAISY (*continuing her rehearsal*) "Mo' grand-dad was the foinest sarpent player in the whole o' Barset 'Ere, grand-dad, wake up an' give us all a tune"

TRISTAN Yes, yes, yes Thank you very much, duckie

DAISY (*going back doggedly*) "Good evenin' all Is moi' grand-dad——"

TRISTAN (*in despair*) No, no, no Not again I must think

DAISY What about?

TRISTAN I dunno Just think about my past and my future With just a passing glance at the Gobi Desert (*Looks in despair at old PUNNET, now dozing again*) How is he? Any rigor mortis setting in?

DAISY *moves to PUNNET*

Enter PERCY, carrying the serpent, stands just outside door, which he has placed open

DAISY Why, there's grand-dad's sarpent Oi, grand-dad, 'e's found it (*Round to back of PUNNET*)

As DAISY tries to waken old PUNNET and PERCY stands like a saxophonist holding the serpent, PAULA and MARTIN enter

PAULA Oh dear! Are the rustic revels still proceeding? Must we go?

TRISTAN (*in comic despair*) No, for God's sake, don't go Everything's slipping Just going all *shummerty-wummerty*

MARTIN Going what?

TRISTAN No, no Don't let's go into it

PERCY (*cheerfully*) Get a load of this, Mr Sprott (*He sounds a deep sustained note on the serpent*)

TRISTAN Percy, you're a marvel Deeper, as Shakespeare nearly said, than Punnet ever sounded

PERCY It's in the bag, eh, Miss Leeds?

PAULA You've only to grow the whiskers, Percy, and then you've got something there

TRISTAN (*suddenly decisive*) Percy—take Miss Punnet and old Mr Punnet and the serpent into Studio Two and give them all some tea (*DAISY and PERCY help PUNNET*) Give the serpent a saucer of milk I'll join you when I'm feeling a little stronger Trot along, Daisy, and just keep going over your lines

DAISY (*crossing as PERCY assists old PUNNET*) "Good evenin' all —is my grand-dad 'ere——"

TRISTAN Yes, yes, Daisy, that's the idea Only not again here I'm not feeling very well

Old PUNNET suddenly and angrily snatches the serpent from PERCY These two, PERCY and DAISY, go trooping across, the old man muttering "slummerty-wummerty", etc, as he goes PERCY closes door TRISTAN stretches out on two chairs, exhausted, down left During following dialogue MARTIN sits at HAYCRAFT'S desk, PAULA on arm of settee

MARTIN (*with quiet despair*) It isn't like this here all the time, is it?

TRISTAN (*dreamily*) Not quite all the time

PAULA (*dreamily*) Sometimes nothing happens for days and days on end Very restful really

TRISTAN This hell on earth we're having now is due to my enthusiasm for my Basset programme I never ought to have touched those Punnets I freely admit it now I was carried away by my enthusiasm

PAULA Where's the rest of your local cast?

TRISTAN They won't be here for hours They're just ordinary plain folks, not like the mad Punnets Are they letting you go back to London, Bradburn?

MARTIN I got through to Radio House, but of course Barton and Rudolph were out I'm going to try again later I can't stay here Even if I wanted to, there isn't room for me

PAULA There really isn't room for anybody except Copley and a couple of admiring secretaries

Enter, with the same hesitant manner, SIR REGINALD

SIR REGINALD Oh—good afternoon Is—er—Commander Copley in?

TRISTAN No, he isn't back yet But he said you might be popping in

SIR REGINALD (*surprised*) Oh—I say—did he?

TRISTAN I think he did (*To PAULA*) Didn't he?

PAULA Yes, he asked us to amuse you until he got back

SIR REGINALD (*still surprised*) Oh—really—I'm rather surprised—I didn't—er—expect—

TRISTAN He said you might be interested to learn a thing or two about broadcasting

SIR REGINALD Well—yes, of course, I would I don't know anything about it—really—and I suppose you people—

TRISTAN (*grimly*) Yes, we know all about it Don't we?

PAULA (*same tone*) We do

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

MARTIN And I'll say we do

SIR REGINALD Yes, well—of course—I'd be delighted Can't begin learning too soon (*Sitting right of desk*)

TRISTAN (*rises and sits astride front chair*) Well now, you see before you three employees of the English Broadcasting Company

SIR REGINALD And—er—what do you do?

PAULA We're all producers This is Martin Bradburn This is Tristan Sprott And I'm Paula Leeds

SIR REGINALD And—er—what do you produce?

MARTIN (*gloomily*) Jolly entertainment for the million

TRISTAN We're in the drama department, and—with a bunch of other people—we handle plays, poetry, readings, and a sort of hybrid product of dreary information and ham acting known in the trade as a "feature"

MARTIN (*rises, down to right of RUNTON*) Some of us were very excited, at first, by the possibilities of broadcasting as a medium I know I thought that with such a vast audience we ought to be able to provide some fine stuff on a grand scale I really believed the air could really be used as a sort of huge People's Theatre Big stuff done in a big way, and handled professionally On a kind of Reinhardt scale

PAULA Don't I know *that* dream? The best plays, the best actors, the best producers We all thought that ought to be possible

SIR REGINALD Quite, quite But—then—er— isn't it?

TRISTAN Do you ever listen to our programmes?

SIR REGINALD The 9 o'clock news occasionally and some of those jolly little nature talks but don't listen to much really

TRISTAN Well, you see, the whole thing comes out of the spout watered down for safety

MARTIN And for economy

PAULA And for stupidity

MARTIN (*turning on SIR REGINALD*) If only the programmes weren't made up and cut into snippets for half-wits who can't concentrate for more than five minutes at a time—one half-wits' night a week would be enough, if you ask me

PAULA Yes, we might call it Half-wits' Night too, and that would sell it

MARTIN British broadcasting at present is mostly just amateurs inside having fun among themselves to amuse amateurs outside Nobody on the staff in authority is an artist or even a good show-

man They don't know what real entertainment means Why, the stuff is stale before the public gets it

TRISTAN Where are the shows of yesteryear? Why, right here, in our programmes

PAULA And we're all typed so stupidly Just because I'm a woman I get handed all the old lace and lavender Any script with a sedan chair in it flies to me like a homing pigeon

MARTIN The trouble is, you see—by the way we're not boring you, are we?

SIR REGINALD Not at all Most int'r'sting You were saying?

MARTIN The trouble is, the English Broadcasting Company is all wrong from top to bottom It's run as a kind of Civil Service department with a bit of broadcasting tacked on as an after-thought

TRISTAN (*rises and sits on back of sofa above PAULA*) The people who *do* the broadcasting, believe it or not, are the least important on the staff

PAULA If you *will* fool about with microphones in studios, you're kept in the slave class

TRISTAN What's really important is our enormous Organisation department, crammed with reliable chaps who work out that if a half-hour programme starts at eight, it ought to finish round about eight-thirty

MARTIN And they obstruct us on principle I think most of 'em hate broadcasting and so do all they can to strangle it

PAULA Half the time, it's just plain jealousy, though They think that producers have a high old time at rehearsals, drinking champagne out of actors' slippers

SIR REGINALD Really—and of course—I don't suppose you do, do you?

PAULA Hardly ever But what with all this policy nonsense and organising and administering and timidity and red-tape, we're so cluttered up with these dead-heads that we can hardly breathe, let alone move

MARTIN (*squatting beside SIR REGINALD*) Now here's something you won't believe—yet it's true and absolutely typical A new deputy-assistant director-general—and we're stiff with deputy-assistants and assistant-deputy-assistants, and the rest of it—well, as I say, a new deputy-assistant D G has been appointed to lord it over us, and do you know where he comes from?

TRISTAN And this, believe it or not, is the truth.

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

MARTIN (*standing right of SIR REGINALD Slowly and impressively*)
He comes—from the *Board of Fisheries*

The three of them begin laughing

PAULA (*laughing*) Straight from his files on the Herring Fleet!

They laugh

SIR REGINALD (*apologetically*) Well—you know—I believe there are one or two quite intelligent—er—administrators—at the Board of Fisheries

The others laugh again

MARTIN (*indignantly*) Yes, but what in the name of thunder do they know about broadcasting?

PAULA I'll bet this Sir Reginald What's-it never even listens in

TRISTAN And any moment now he'll come bouncing in here, asking idiotic questions and then firing even more idiotic memos at us The whole E B C system is cock-eyed

MARTIN Half-witted

PAULA Wasteful, pedantic and stupid

MARTIN (*sits right*) And that, my dear sir, is broadcasting

SIR REGINALD (*who appears to have been cornered and overwhelmed*)
Yes—I see—well, you appear to have very strong views—really I hadn't the least idea—

HAYCRAFT and PERCY, with scripts, etc., enter and cross, preparing to broadcast The other four are grouped upstage, with SIR REGINALD facing the other three and with his back to studio end PERCY is preparing his effects GRONOVA enters hastily, without looking at SIR REGINALD, and takes her place at piano BOB and HETTY now enter looking furious, and quarrelling

HETTY (*to her chair, reckless of being overheard*) And after all I've done for you!

BOB (*angrily*) Well, what have you done for me? You talk as if I'd been paralysed for ten years!

HETTY You were paralysed half the time when I tried to make something out of you

BOB You made something out of me! eh?

HETTY Oh—shut up!

BOB And you shut up!

PAULA (*explaining sweetly*) Just Aunt Hetty and Uncle Bob getting ready for the Children's Hour

As they take their places, still muttering and glowering at each other, COPLEY enters

TRISTAN (*to* SIR REGINALD) Oh, sir, here's your friend Commander Copley

SIR REGINALD (*turning distinctly*) Oh—(*rises*)—Commander Copley—I'm Sir Reginald Runton

COPLEY What—our new deputy-assistant director-general?

TRISTAN (*in anguish*) Oh—slummerty-wummerty!

But GRONOVA turns excitedly on her piano stool

GRONOVA (*rises*) Sir Reginald Runton?

SIR REGINALD (*surprised*) Yes (*Turns to her*)

GRONOVA (*joyfully*) Topsy!

MOYA *drops an armful of music on* TRISTAN *He and* MARTIN *dive on floor to pick it up*

COPLEY (*shocked*) Topsy!

HAYCRAFT *Quiet, please!*

A steady red Everybody frozen, except for their eyes, which express their bewilderment, consternation, etc HAYCRAFT begins in the most arch manner

HAYCRAFT Hello, Children! This is Uncle Fairfax, talking to you from the Basset Regional Studio And here's Aunt Moya, all ready at the piano—aren't you, Aunt Moya?

GRONOVA (*rather shakily*) Ye—es, Uncle Faxf—Fairfax (*Plays a little run*)

HAYCRAFT And Uncle Bob's here too

BOB (*in deep, still cross voice*) Yes, I'm here, Uncle Fairfax

HAYCRAFT But where's Aunt Hetty this afternoon? Aunt Hetty, Aunt Hetty! I say children, this is serious No Aunt Hetty

PERCY *now solemnly opens and closes door effect*

HETTY (*doing running in effect*) Here I am so sorry, Uncle Fairfax Hello, children!

SIR REGINALD (*innocently forgetting*) I say—rather jolly that——!

He is immediately sh-sh'd and almost collapses

HAYCRAFT And now that we're all here, children, we're going to give you another adventure in our serial, *Elsie and the Pirates* Some Pirate music please, Aunt Moya

SIR REGINALD *offers* COPLEY *a cigarette* GRONOVA *obliges with some pirate music* *Music starts*

You'll remember that we left the pirates all having a tremendous fight among themselves

PERCY *clashes cutlasses, etc, while the cast do atmospheric noises—groans, shouts, etc*

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

HETTY (*in little-girl style*) Oh dear, Elsie thought, whatever shall I do If I run away I shall never be able to find the treasure No, I *won't* run away I *must* be brave

HAYCRAFT Just then she noticed that one of the biggest and strongest of the pirates, with an *enormous* black beard, had stopped fighting (PERCY *stops knives*) Perhaps because he was hurt, and was sitting groaning just near her hiding place So she crept out

PERCY *makes sea noise*

BOB (*in pirate style*) Ohhh! (*Groans*) Them tarnation old wounds o' mine is openin' agin

HETTY (*as* ELSIE) Mr Pirate! *Please* Mr Pirate!

BOB (*as* PIRATE) Oo's a-whisperin'? Why—stap my vitals—if it isn't the little gal!

HETTY Mr Pirate, are you hurt?

BOB I be mortal bad, missie, mortal bad Get me a canikin o' rum, missie

HETTY If I do, will you help me to find the treasure? It belongs to my grandfather really, you know And I know he'll give you a big reward, and then you needn't be a pirate any more

PERCY *stops sea noise*

BOB Missie, I never wanted to be a pirate, s'elp me Bob Bring me a swig o' rum, sharp (*Groans*)

PERCY *picks up, earphones off*

HAYCRAFT So Elsie ran below, for she knew where the rum was—for, as you know, Elsie was a clever little girl and noticed *everything*—and then she hurried back—(PERCY *taps his feet and moves to left of* BOB)—and gave the rum to Blackbeard

BOB Arr—bless yer little 'eart 'Ere goes—yer 'ealth, missie

PERCY *does loud gurgling effect*

HETTY What did you want to be, Mr Blackbeard, instead of being a pirate? (PERCY *ready with knives*)

BOB (*whispering*) A market gardener, missie, out Saffron Walden way Now, if you promise that if I helps you to git the treasure, you'll set me up in a nice market garden out Saffron Walden way, then I'm yer man, see?

HETTY Oh yes—I promise And thank you! Isn't this *exciting*? (PERCY *clashes knives*)

HAYCRAFT But it was even *more* exciting than Elsie imagined, for just as she and Blackbeard had agreed to find the treasure together, the fighting among the pirates suddenly stopped (PERCY *stops knives and puts them down, picking up drum-stick*)

BOB (*in another voice*) A sail! A sail!

PERCY *now does distant gun effect One bang on drum*

A frigate o' the line She's firing across our bows, an' a signalling
of us to stop

PERCY *does three bangs on drum*

HETTY Oh dear—this is going to be *very* difficult

GRONOVA *plays softly*

HAYCRAFT (*very arch*) Listen again, children, in a fortnight's time
to another thrilling adventure of *Elsie and the Pirates* And listen
to-morrow to your friends Goosie and Henny Good night, children

HETTY, BOB and GRONOVA Good night, children

HAYCRAFT (*super-arch*) Good night, children, everywhere

Quick curtain as red light goes out and GRONOVA plays louder

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

As before, evening

Just before rise of curtain we hear the piano being played Door is open
TRISTAN *playing piano*, HETTY *at desk sitting* BOB *down left sitting*
on small table

HETTY Well, aren't you going to tell us what we ought to do? Do I go on living with him or don't I?

BOB (*hastily Rises and crosses to settee*) Now just a moment, don't start making a personal favour of it like that We agreed——

HETTY (*cutting in*) We agreed to let Tristan decide for us, so don't start arguing all over again

BOB (*angrily*) I'm not arguing all over again I was going to say that we'd agreed to let Tristan decide——

HETTY Well then, why don't you shut up, and let him decide?

BOB *sits in small chair left*

TRISTAN (*stops playing piano*) But I can't attend to your problem, can't give it my full attention, until I know what's become of those three local idiots My programme will be on the air in an hour, and half the cast hasn't turned up Give me a chance

EDNA *looks in*

(*Up to her*) Well, Edna?

EDNA The man at the garage at Long Boopley says they left there all right, after he'd done something to the magneto He says we haven't to worry

TRISTAN (*cheerful now*) All right then, we won't worry

EDNA But I suppose I'd better ring up the other place—Bursetford—to see if they know anything about them?

TRISTAN Yes, though they'll probably be here now before you get through No need to worry, though, that's the point

EDNA A call came through from London for Sir Reginald Runton——

TRISTAN Oh dear! Oh dear, oh dear!

EDNA I told them to try the County Hotel I think he's dining there——

HETTY With Moya?

EDNA Yes, I believe so (*Gong*) Well, I'll ring up Bursetford

She goes out

TRISTAN (*sits cross-legged on floor with playing-cards Cheerfully*) Let's hope Moya is putting in some very heavy do-you-remember-darling work on him, or some of us are sunk But there's no need to worry about my cast It's on its way So now, children, I examine your problem in the spirit in which it ought to be examined And I say to you, giving you at the same time an old man's blessing, forgive and forget Hetty, if you take my advice you'll forgive him

BOB Now wait a minute What's all this forgiving about?

HETTY (*indignantly*) You're not going to tell me now I haven't plenty to forgive My lord, when I think—

TRISTAN (*cutting in*) Now, now, now, comrades! Not again And to you, Bob I say—life is too short and we are creatures of sorrow—be tolerant Hetty has her faults—

HETTY (*angrily*) It's not Hetty's faults we're talking about

BOB Of course it is

HETTY What, after the way you went on this afternoon!

BOB There isn't a man alive who wouldn't have— Tristan, I appeal to you

TRISTAN (*cutting in*) No, no, no Don't disappoint me After all, life is hard, my friends There is nothing we can do, in the end, but be kind to each other So—forgive and forget You two, with all your faults, were meant to cherish each other So give him a smile, Hetty Bob, open your arms And bless you, my children!

BOB (*disgusted*) What is this—a musical monologue?

Moves up to piano and leans on it looking upstage

HETTY (*rises*) I thought you'd give us a bit of sensible advice, not "Bob, open your arms" Look at him!

Sits in desk chair

TRISTAN But this isn't the right spirit at all As we travel along life's highway, we must greet each moment with a smile and turn to each fellow wayfarer with loving-kindness—

HETTY (*bitterly*) Wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year

TRISTAN Now look at me What a day I've had so far! Including, don't forget, giving the lowdown on the whole E B C to its new deputy-assistant D G, little Reggie Runtton But am I cast down? Do I lose my bright friendly smile? Do I— (*Breaks off because EDNA enters again*)

EDNA They got as far as Bursetford and then the car broke down again and so they gave it up as a bad job

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

TRISTAN (*leaning on sofa Horrified*) Do you mean they're not coming here?

EDNA Yes All three of them have gone home

TRISTAN (*furious*) My godfathers! Completely let down! That's the last time I ever ask any of these bullock-witted rural stinkers to do anything for me, the very last time Why was I ever condemned to do programmes in this manure-heap, tell me that? (*Sits settee Groans*) All right, Edna

She goes

HETTY Can we get anybody here to help us with the programme?

TRISTAN We'll have to, that's all

BOB I can always do a good double

HETTY Your only double is whisky

TRISTAN (*gloomily*) That's an idea—whisky The best thing we can do now is to get screaming drunk We'll never get through this programme sober Let's go and join Martin Bradburn at the *Lion* I left him there, putting 'em down steadily And as for you two—
(*Back to cards*)

HETTY (*after pause*) Well, what about us two?

TRISTAN (*picking up cards*) If you want *my* advice, you'll give up trying to live together Obviously you don't really like each other What's the use of spending your time having rows?

BOB { (*indignantly*) What d'you mean—spending our time having rows?

HETTY { (*rises Indignantly*) Who told you we didn't like each other?

BOB Let me tell you this, Hetty and I can get on better together than any couple I know in this barmy broadcasting company of yours

HETTY Yes, and we don't need drink to do it on either, do we, Bob?

BOB No, we don't, Hetty At least—not much Now listen to me, Tristan, when you've seen as much of life as I have, when you've been around and seen what a miserable mess most people make of it, the last thing you'll want to do is try and separate two hard-working decent pro's who are fond of each other and know how to look after each other

HETTY That's right, Bob Here!

BOB (*crosses to her*) Sorry I threw my weight about, old girl Won't happen again

HETTY Never mind, Bob It was half my fault (*Looking indignantly*) My word, if one took notice of *some* people!

BOB He's young and silly He'll *learn*

TRISTAN Now I only——

HETTY (*severely*) You've said enough for one night Come on, Bob, I know you're dying for a drink

They go out, affectionately TRISTAN *looks after them in comic despair* On their exit TRISTAN *crawls across to piano*

TRISTAN *plays a few notes of "The Dead March"—then on COPLEY's entrance changes to "A Life on the Ocean Wave" and stops when COPLEY speaks*

COPLEY and DOROTHY, *dressed for going out, now enter* COPLEY *is spreading himself on some glamorous tale of his service life* They come down centre

COPLEY So I said to Jumbo, "Look here, old boy, you and I can take on a dozen of these dagoes, can't we?" And Jumbo said, "You bet your life we can, Coppo " They called me Coppo in that ship But things weren't looking too bright The first dago pulled out a knife You know what these chaps are

TRISTAN (*who wasn't asked*) Yes, by Gad, Sir! Always ready to pull out their knives, but when it comes to war, terrified of the bayonet—cold steel

COPLEY Well, you know, that's about it Just show 'em the bayonet——

TRISTAN Just show *me* the bayonet, and see what I'd do Tristan Sprotto would run quite as fast as any dago, Coppo

DOROTHY (*possessively*) Tell me what happened afterwards It's frightfully exciting But don't spoil it now

COPLEY No Remind me to finish the yarn at dinner We're going across to the *County* for a bite of food

TRISTAN And I'm going across to the *Lion* for a gallon of whisky

COPLEY Everything all right?

TRISTAN Everything's splendid I've carefully insulted the E B C to one of its senior officials Half my cast aren't coming at all The other half—the mad Punnets—seem to have disappeared We're on the air in less than forty minutes, and, if time allows, I propose to get screaming drunk

Enter MARTIN

MARTIN (*to TRISTAN*) I thought you were coming back to the pub

TRISTAN I am

DOROTHY (*to COPLEY*) Shall we go?

MARTIN Are you going to the pub too?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

COPLEY I'm giving Dorothy a bite of dinner at the *County*

MARTIN (*looking carefully at them*) Do I congratulate you both?

DOROTHY and COPLEY *look at each other, embarrassed*

I believe I do too!

COPLEY Well, what do *you* say, Dorothy?

DOROTHY Oh—all right—I suppose it was bound to come out soon

COPLEY We'd meant to keep it quiet for a month or two, old boy—you know, bit embarrassing for us both—but—well—seeing you've guessed it——

TRISTAN (*shaking hands with COPLEY*) I think it's wonderful

MARTIN (*shaking hands with DOROTHY*) So do I

TRISTAN It's a perfect match (*TRISTAN and MARTIN shake hands across centre and down*) That's what I say, and I shall go on saying it When people ask me what I think—and they will, you know—I shall say "I think it's a perfect match"

COPLEY (*shakes hands again with TRISTAN*) Thanks, Tristan Flatters *me* too much, of course—but still——

MARTIN No, I don't think it does I might have done at one time, but now I don't

DOROTHY (*annoyed*) You're not being insulting, by any chance, are you?

COPLEY No, Dorothy, of course he isn't

TRISTAN No, Dorothy, of course he isn't Martin couldn't insult anybody or anything—except of course the entire English Broadcasting Company—about which we'll all hear more later (*MARTIN moves up to desk*)

DOROTHY All right Come on, Arthur

They go out, DOROTHY with a fine possessive air

TRISTAN (*sits on arm of settee*) It's nice to think that Copley's called Arthur

MARTIN Now why didn't I realise before how terribly stupid that girl is?

TRISTAN You weren't in a fit condition to realise it She's one of the stupidest girls in the E B C and that's saying plenty But then you're one of those clever fellows who are idiotic when it comes to women

MARTIN (*rising*)· I was, but I'm learning Where's Paula?

TRISTAN Gone home long since

MARTIN I call that a dirty trick (*Sits on downstage edge of desk centre*)

TRISTAN Why, you can't expect her to hang about here all night, on the off-chance of amusing you

MARTIN I oughtn't to expect it, but somehow I do Pity she isn't more attractive

TRISTAN Don't be a dam' fool

MARTIN What does that mean?

TRISTAN I thought you theatrical producers were supposed to have eyes

MARTIN Some of us have

TRISTAN Then take a good look at Paula next time That is, if there is a next time, and we don't all get the sack, by special courier, to-night

MARTIN I suppose we might What are you going to do then?

TRISTAN I shall disguise myself as an Armenian astrologer and let my mother keep me As a matter of fact, we've done nothing to deserve the sack and if we had, the E B C wouldn't sack us They'll just find some way of killing us by inches, in the decent Civil Service fashion

Enter JOE with record of "Shepherd's Hey"

JOE They're back, Mr Sprott

TRISTAN Who is? What is?

JOE Them Punnets

MARTIN (*rises*) I'm going back to the pub (*Going towards door*)

TRISTAN Wait for me Order me a double horse's neck

MARTIN *goes*

TRISTAN (*to JOE*) How are the Punnets?

JOE Mad as hell They're asking for you Shall I send 'em in?

TRISTAN Certainly Joe, certainly They're all I've left for to-night's programme

JOE D'you know what I think, Mr Sprott?

TRISTAN Yes, Joe You think it's all escapist and that we ought to be doing a programme all about the town drains, with an interlude for you to tell us about your Toscanini rehearsals

JOE (*solemnly*) Allow me to finish, Mr Sprott What I think is this—that the sooner these outsiders are stopped from coming in to do bits in programmes the better There ought to be a radio trade union, and no outsiders allowed

TRISTAN What about Toscanini?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

JOE He'd join the union (*Crosses and puts record in position upstage*)

The PUNNETS burst in They are carrying several awkward-shaped parcels, but no serpent They are very angry

DAISY (*loudly*) My grand-dad says 'e's 'ad enough

TRISTAN Had enough? He hasn't begun yet

DAISY 'E says 'e's going 'ome An' I'm not goin' to try an' stop 'im, becos I've 'ad enough too

TRISTAN But why? We've all been very nice to you, haven't we?

DAISY No, yew 'aven't Not a single one of you 'cept Mr Haycraft, an' 'e's gone

TRISTAN But he'll be back to do the announcing—

DAISY 'E'll do no announcin' for us, will 'e, grand-dad?

PUNNET (*winding himself up to speak, and clutching at various parcels*) GRITTI! Oi make nuthin' of it at all, this yer E B C (*Crosses to right of TRISTAN*) Nuthin' at all, oi don't It be all—all—

TRISTAN (*triumphantly*) I know Slummerty-wummerty

PUNNET (*snarling scornfully*) Neow—yew're wrong, young man (*Loudly, to DAISY*) Daft in the 'ead, this un be, as I tould ee

TRISTAN (*conciliatory*) Well, I may be a bit daft in the head—wouldn't be at all surprised—but this afternoon you said it was all slummerty-wummerty

DAISY It's worse nor that now, ain't it, grand-dad?

PUNNET (*triumphantly*) Ay Oi've got a word for un—for all this yer foolish E B C wamsy—ay, masters—for neow oi think it be all midgety-madgety Neow more an' neow less nor midgety-madgety (*Looks round triumphantly, as if for applause*)

JOE (*seriously*) I ask you, Mr Sprott, how are you going to make a revolution of the workers with types like that about?

TRISTAN (*moves a little nearer to JOE*) Well, he seems to be making one all right

JOE No education, that's the trouble

DAISY Don't you be insulting

PUNNET (*still having trouble with his parcels, but now launched into big speeches and enjoying himself*) Eddication, young man! Oi tell ee—it be all yer mimsy-mamsy eddication an' yer midgety-madgety E B C an' the like 'at's takin' the lads out o' the fields an' the maidens out o' the dairies—

TRISTAN (*helps PUNNET to adjust parcels, forcefully*) Now look here, grand-dad, never mind the big agricultural issue just now The

point is, you promised to help me to-night with my Barset programme and now you say you won't

DAISY He thinks he did it this morning

TRISTAN Oh—my hat! But explain, that was only a rehearsal

JOE We've tried him but he won't understand about rehearsals,
Mr Sprott No education, see?

DAISY So now he wants to go home—an' I don't blame him—the way we've been messed about to-day something shameful

TRISTAN (*making a last attempt*) Now look here, grand-dad, I—

PUNNET (*his big speech*) Grrrr! If oi'd the care of ee, young man, oi'd grand-dad ee wi' a big stick, oi would—ay, masters, oi would—to knock parcel o' daftness out o' your head Eddication! E B C, an' woirseless! Can ee do hedgin' an' ditchin'? Can ee harrow an' plough an' mow an' reap? Can ee milk a cow or calf a cow? Can ee dip a sheep or shear a sheep? Can ee ring a pig? Can ee harness an' droive a team o' horses? Who were the best bee-keeper there ever were i' North Barset?

TRISTAN You were

PUNNET (*triumphantly*) Wrong again, young man, for it were ould Sam'l Daggs out at Little Fitchington Yer know nuthun' but bits o' mimsy-mamsy, midgety-madgety (*Moves right, taking DAISY's hand* TRISTAN *follows, then PUNNET turns on him*) It's the first toime yer get Matthew Punnet to yer E B C an' it's the last Oi promised to play me serpent for ee, an' oi played un this marnin', so now oi be off home (*Crosses to door*)

DAISY (*stopping*) But where is your serpent, grand-dad?

PUNNET (*passes DAISY across himself to door and she exits*) 'Old yer tongue, girl, an' be off home, where we belong proper Let un keep bloody ould serpent (*Turning in doorway to TRISTAN*)

He goes out hurriedly

TRISTAN And that, Joe, just tears it (*Staggers across to left and sits on effects box*) Now there can't be a Barset programme The listeners will get thirty minutes of gramophone records and I shall most certainly get the boot Well, remember me to all the boys, Joe

JOE Now Mr Sprott, it isn't as bad as that You'll manage somehow

TRISTAN Not this time, Joe Sunk without a trace I knew it this morning when I woke up Something told me

Enter PAULA She has changed her clothes, taken off her spectacles, etc, and now looks very attractive indeed

PAULA Good evening, Tristan. Hello, Joe

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

TRISTAN (*sadly*) Hello, Paula You look beautiful I feel like death

PAULA Tell me afterwards I want Edna

JOE I'll tell her

Goes out up right

PAULA (*to downstage edge of piano*) What about Sir Reginald Runton?

TRISTAN He's giving Moya dinner at the *County*, and for all I know, they may be doing a big Chekhov act together—telling each other over the prunes and custard that in a hundred years time life will be very beautiful But what I do know is that he's talking to London, and London's talking to him

PAULA With certain names, no doubt, passing along the wire

TRISTAN No doubt, no doubt A brewing of hell broth Meanwhile, to give it a seasoning, there'll be no "Down Here in Barset" programme to-night

PAULA I've heard you say that before

TRISTAN But then I had most of my cast Now I haven't any, except Hetty and Bob And it's too late to change the script No, it's gramophone records to-night, and curtains to-morrow

Enter EDNA She is dressed to go out

PAULA (*crosses down to centre*) Any telegram, Edna?

EDNA Yes, it came about half an hour ago over the telephone (*Reads it*) "Harland agreeable to your producer if you insist Blake"

PAULA Good!

TRISTAN What is all this about, Paula?

PAULA I'll explain later Does anybody know where Martin Bradburn is?

TRISTAN Yes, he's across at the *Lion*, doing some serious drinking

PAULA Edna, you're going home now, aren't you?

EDNA Yes, unless you want me for anything.

PAULA No, thanks But would you mind looking in at the *Lion* on your way, and asking Martin Bradburn if he'd mind coming back here to see me about something Say it's important

EDNA I'll go now

TRISTAN I'll be going there myself in a minute

PAULA No, you won't You've a programme to do

TRISTAN I tell you—there can't be a programme—

PAULA All right, Edna You tell him Good night

EDNA (*going*) Good night, Miss Leeds

TRISTAN By the way, Copley and the Limple girl are tied up

PAULA No

TRISTAN Yes, definitely Already the salad bowl from the staff and the fortnight in Torquay are stirring in the womb of Time

PAULA Does Martin Bradburn know?

TRISTAN Yes We congratulated them

PAULA Did he mind?

TRISTAN No, the cure's complete

PAULA Thank goodness! (*Turns up to desk*)

TRISTAN Why?

PAULA Well, I hate to see a man making a fool of—(*Sits at desk*)

TRISTAN Yes, yes Yes, yes, yes Quite so

Enter BRENDA hurriedly and excitedly

BRENDA (*breathless*) Mr Sprott!

TRISTAN (*preparing to go*) No, Brenda, a thousand times no

BRENDA (*getting in his way*) Oh—but please listen, Mr Sprott—

TRISTAN The smallest imitation from you, Brenda—the tiniest flick of Beatrice Lillie or Gertrude Lawrence—at this moment, and I fell you to the ground

BRENDA No, please, Mr Sprott, it's not that—

TRISTAN What, no impersonation?

BRENDA Yes, but—

TRISTAN I don't care who they are, Brenda—English, American, even Chinese—I won't have 'em

BRENDA (*pleading hard*) But this is *different* You'll want it to-night Listen! (*In perfect imitation of DAISY PUNNET*) "Good evenin' all Is moi grand-dad 'ere?"

TRISTAN (*impressed*) I say! That's pure Punnet Go on

BRENDA (*as before*) "Moi grand-dad was the foinest serpent player in the whole o' Barset 'Ere, grand-dad, wake up an' give us all a tune"

TRISTAN Duckie, it's perfect, but perfect You could go straight into the programme with that

BRENDA (*excitedly*) Well then, why can't I?

TRISTAN You can

BRENDA (*bubbling over*) Oh gosh! That's marvellous I've been practising for hours

TRISTAN (*who has been thinking*) No, it's no good

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

BRENDA Oh—but why?

TRISTAN Not because of you, Brenda You're Daisy Punnet plus that little bit of something the Punnets never had *But*—you see, duckie—those lines of Daisy's were put into the script simply to introduce the big star act—old man Punnet's serpent-playing—a unique turn And now the old man's gone home, all midgety-madgety

BRENDA Yes, but the serpent hasn't

TRISTAN Where is it?

BRENDA It's still here (*Moves to door*)

TRISTAN Waiting for its mate, I suppose (*BRENDA stops*) But, you see, these serpents don't play themselves

BRENDA No—but—just wait (*Goes to door and calls*) Percy, Percy

After a moment, PERCY enters with the serpent

TRISTAN (*excitedly*) Don't tell me you can play that thing, Percy?

PERCY Listen to this, Mr Sprott (*Sits right below HAYCRAFT's desk He plays a short jazzy phrase*)

PAULA Don't swing it, Percy

TRISTAN (*kneels on settee—triumphantly*) Oh—midgety-madgety—we can do it, we can do it Paula

PAULA Yes

TRISTAN (*calling across*) You must read the part of Nancy, assistant barmaid at the old *Brown Cow*

PAULA But really, Tristan, you can't drag me into your programme—especially as a Barsetshire rustic

TRISTAN Why not? By this time you're more a Barsetshire rustic than anyone else in the cast—you've been down here the longest

Enter MARTIN

Bradburn, I congratulate you

MARTIN Why?

TRISTAN You're going to read the part of Mr Caxton, a regular patron of the old *Brown Cow*, in my programme to-night

MARTIN I'm not (*Up to HAYCRAFT's desk*)

TRISTAN You must Two lines—literally And Paula's in it too

PAULA I didn't say—

TRISTAN Besides, you two fancy yourselves as people of the theatre Well then, the show must go on (*To BRENDA and PERCY*) Come on, toots, we've work to do.

They go out PERCY closes door MARTIN stares appreciatively at PAULA He has come down to her left

MARTIN (*admiringly*) I say!

PAULA What do you say?

MARTIN Why don't you always look like this?

PAULA I try to, outside the E B C I called in to collect a telegram I was expecting

MARTIN (*disappointed*) Oh—you're going on somewhere

PAULA I was To see some people I know

MARTIN But you asked me to come across to see you

PAULA Yes, did you mind?

MARTIN No, I'm glad

PAULA (*moves away to front of piano*) You see, I couldn't say it before, because of the telegram

MARTIN Where does the telegram come in?

PAULA I'll explain later But this really is important (*Leans on piano—pauses, then earnestly*) Martin, why did you leave the theatre? You were doing grand work there and you must have loved it

MARTIN I did love it, but I began to feel it didn't love me much

PAULA Not enough work?

MARTIN Not enough regular work And no security I was beginning to be frightened You see, I began producing in repertory You know the sort of thing—eighteen hours a day, and never having time to get anything right Then I took a chance and went to London

PAULA Well, then you got plenty of work

MARTIN I had three plays to produce in my first year One good one—two duds The next year, apart from some not very bright Sunday shows, I only had two to produce—one a good one, but it was a flop—and the other the usual Surrey lounge-hall bit of nonsense, which wasn't even a successful bit of nonsense Then I'd been too pleased with myself and had rows, and, I suppose, made enemies And then I began to get frightened No work coming along No money I was broke and didn't seem to be getting anywhere at all I'd never bothered much about broadcasting, hardly ever listened in—and thought radio drama just third-rate footling stuff

PAULA Which it mostly is

MARTIN Yes, but I happened just then to listen to an E B C production of *The Wild Duck* And it was good

PAULA (*very quietly*) You mean the one Margaret Owen did?

MARTIN Yes You knew her, of course?

PAULA She was my greatest friend She died just after she did that production I begged them to do a memorial programme of her

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

work—a lot of her shows had been recorded—but of course they wouldn't. They just wanted to forget her. I never forgave them for that. It was then I stopped caring much about my work. Sorry—go on.

MARTIN (*humbly*) I've never understood you at all, have I?

PAULA No, you don't really know anything about me. But then how could you?

MARTIN I ought to have guessed.

PAULA (*sits on settee arm, facing MARTIN*) Please go on about yourself. This really is important.

MARTIN Well, after hearing that production, I thought, 'What's wrong with doing some of this stuff?' So I made enquiries, and they were all very nice and flattering to me at Radio House, and after a short trial trip, I signed a contract and joined the staff. That's all.

PAULA No, it isn't. What's happened to you since?

MARTIN Nothing very much. (*Moves down left*) You know that part as well as I do. I can't really complain. If I haven't got on too well, I suppose it's mostly my own fault.

PAULA No, you're wrong, it isn't really. That's what we all come to think. But it's not true. Just because, behind all their fuss and silly memos, they seem easy-going and kind and considerate.

MARTIN That's just it. You know what a hell the theatre can be.

PAULA Yes, but that's because it's *alive*. And this isn't. It's a nice, easy-going, kind and considerate machine—but it's still a machine. And after a time it quietly takes something vital and essential out of you.

MARTIN Yes, I've been wondering about that. Something certainly seems to go.

PAULA It does. I'm nearly an old stager now. Ten years of it. I've watched 'em come and go. It's not broadcasting itself. I suppose at best it's a rather limited medium, but it can be turned into something vital, moving, quite beautiful sometimes. Margaret did it. I even did it myself once or twice. What's wrong is the organisation itself, the machine. It doesn't care—and the people who run it don't care—for that precious vital impulse which makes the artist an artist. And so that impulse just fades away and dies. And that's why some of us sit about making wisecracks. If we didn't laugh so much, we might start to cry.

MARTIN But *you* haven't given in, Paula. You couldn't talk like this if you had. You're alive all right.

PAULA Only just. And I'm really very tough, very fierce, very determined, though I may not look it.

MARTIN You don't—thank God!

PAULA Besides—I've found—well—compensations

MARTIN (*alarmed*) You're not in love with somebody?

PAULA No, I didn't mean that

MARTIN You terrified me then Listen, Paula—

PAULA No, Martin, let's finish this first It's most important
Never mind about regular work and security and all the rest of it
You must get out of the E B C—at once, before it's too late—and
you must go back to the theatre

MARTIN But who wants me? What am I going to do?

PAULA You've got to take a chance on that I may tell you that
I'm going, as soon as they'll let me resign, and I don't think they'll
make any difficulties about that, after what Sir Reginald Runton has
told them to-night

MARTIN That goes for me, too

PAULA Yes, that goes for you too Now you may have been
forgotten in the theatre, you may have to start all over again, but
that's the chance you've got to take, Martin

MARTIN It'll be a lot worse than you think, Paula And I'm still
almost broke

PAULA I dare say

MARTIN You wouldn't like me to kiss you, would you?

PAULA No One thing at a time is my motto And you've got
to decide, Martin You've got to leap into the dark

MARTIN (*after a pause, decisively*) I'll do it

PAULA That's what I wanted to hear you say, Martin I wanted
to feel you were ready to take the chance

MARTIN Well, I am And a pretty thin chance it'll be

PAULA It's not as bad as you think There's a play you can do
at once—for Harland

MARTIN Harland? But how's that? Whose play is it?

PAULA It's mine I was determined not to tell you until you'd
decided to take the chance Harland has accepted a play of mine for
production at once, and he's agreed to let you produce it if I insist
And now—I *do* insist.

MARTIN (*delighted*) Good lord, Paula—but this is marvellous
(*Moves to her*) What a girl!

As he advances upon her, JOE enters

JOE Ahem! The little big noise is back

PAULA. What do you mean?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

JOE Our new D A D G—Sir Reg So look out (*Moving up*) I think—he's bottled

JOE goes out

MARTIN He won't have it all his own way I'm rather bottled myself

PAULA Now listen, darling, there's only one thing to do As soon as we see him, we announce that we're resigning

MARTIN Right What's your play called?

PAULA (*hastily*) *The Silver Ship*—but we can talk about that afterwards

MARTIN I adore you

PAULA Good And we can talk a lot about *that* afterwards But just now we've got to disentangle ourselves from our E B C contracts

MARTIN I'll bet Sir Reginald's going to throw 'em in our faces

PAULA Here he comes

Enter SIR REGINALD with MOYA GRONOVA They have been dining, and both are in fine form

SIR REGINALD (*continuing some splendid reminiscence for the admiring MOYA*) So he said "I don't know why you should say that, Runton" So I said, "Aren't you forgetting one thing, Smithers?" "What's that?" he said "Aren't you forgetting," I said, "that beaten copper work has been one of my hobbies for over thirty years?" So I really do know what I'm talking about, old chap," I said

GRONOVA (*earnestly*) I think you were—*splendeed*

SIR REGINALD (*jovially*) A-ha—we—er—meet again, Miss—er—Leeds—Mr—er—

MARTIN Bradburn

SIR REGINALD Yes, of course—Bradburn (*Sits on arm of settee*)

GRONOVA (*sits in desk chair*) Paula, we 'ad the most wonderful deener

PAULA I thought you went to the *County*

GRONOVA We did But to-night—it was all—*speciale* (*Flashing a terrific glance at SIR REGINALD*) Thanks to you

SIR REGINALD (*pleased*) Well—I always say—you can get a decent dinner out of these places—if you only take a little trouble—and of course I'm an old traveller

PAULA (*stoutly*) Sir Reginald, Martin Bradburn and I want to offer the company our resignations

MARTIN Thanks, Paula (*Crosses to left of PAULA*) Yes, our resignations

SIR REGINALD *and* GRONOVA *are* exchanging delighted glances

PAULA We're quite willing to leave at once We'll go quietly

GRONOVA (*to* SIR REGINALD) What did I tell you, my dear? I knew they would feel like that

SIR REGINALD (*smiling*) You did Well, well, well, well!

He is highly amused PAULA *and* MARTIN *stare at him in bewilderment*

HAYCRAFT, BOB *and* HETTY *come in* Lights are switched on left and they take up positions at studio end

JOE *enters up right, crosses behind piano to lower mike* HAYCRAFT *above desk to switch on standard lamp—on his entrance he taps GRONOVA on shoulder, she then moves to piano and sits ready*

MARTIN What's the joke?

SIR REGINALD (*still amused*) It's not a joke really—but I can't help being amused by the way in which you've misjudged the—er—attitude of the company and myself We're really not like that, y'know

PERCY *with serpent, and then* TRISTAN, *enter*

TRISTAN (*seeing* SIR REGINALD) Oh—help!

SIR REGINALD (*loudly*) Ah! And here's the other culprit—eh? Also ready to offer his resignation, eh? (*Moves to* TRISTAN)

TRISTAN Let me do my programme first The show must go on

SIR REGINALD! You see, I spoke to the assistant director-general at Radio House to-night, and told him frankly what you three had said about the organisation and policy of the company—

TRISTAN All right, don't rub it in I must go and work the panel for the last time (*He goes into producer's box*)

MARTIN (*to* PAULA) Everything's okay We're fired

PAULA I don't know He's got a dangerous pleasant look in his eye

SIR REGINALD (*loudly*) Fortunately the English Broadcasting Company can appreciate frankness and forthright criticism, so I'm delighted to tell you that you've all been promoted and your contracts extended—

PAULA (*in horror*) Oh crickey! (*Sits on arm of settee.*)

MARTIN (*horrified*) What—can't we leave? (*Kneels on settee above* PAULA)

SIR REGINALD Certainly not. You've been promoted to the

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

Organisation Department Mr Sprott has been made Assistant
Organiser of Overseas Religion

TRISTAN (*through speaker, horrified*) What?

SIR REGINALD You, Mr Bradburn, have been appointed Con-
troller of co-ordinated regional children's programmes

MARTIN (*horror-struck*) Suffering Moses! (*Falls on to the settee*)

SIR REGINALD And you, Miss Leeds, will be director of our new
Mother's Hour—"Kitchen, Kiddies and Crêpe-de-Chine"

PAULA *breaks into a peal of laughter* The red light is now
flukering HAYCRAFT is at the mike

HAYCRAFT (*sternly*) Quiet, please! (*Announces*) "Down Here in
Barset" To-night we present another half-hour of Barsetshire
humour, melody and folk-lore, in a programme written and produced
by Tristan Sprott It's a beautiful summer night—the men have
returned from the hayfields—the door of that friendly old pub the
Brown Cow stands wide open—"Down Here in Barset"

MOYA *plays her tune* PERCY *does effects* They all, except SIR
REGINALD, now in background, produce atmosphere noises

BOB (*in rural voice*) 'Nother point o' coider, Rose Oi saw your
young man over boi Jenkins' twenty-acre

HETTY (*same style*) He's no young man o' moine, Charlie Bragg
isn't—not since Michaelmas Fair

BOB Didn't buy ee a proper fairing, oi'll be bound, Rose

HAYCRAFT (*rural*) Oi 'eard tell on 'at tew, Garge

PAULA (*in fine rustic fashion*) What yew tew 'eard tell on 'at isn't
trew would fill the Barsetshire News onny Friday What's for yew,
Muster Caxton?

PAULA and MARTIN *are sharing a mike with their backs to the
audience, and we see them squeezing hands behind their backs*

MARTIN (*rural*) Pint of old an' mild, Miss Nancy

PAULA (*as before*) Yes, Muster Caxton Would yew be giving us
a song to-noight, Muster Caxton?

HAYCRAFT We do be expectin' your old 'ay-makin' song to-
noight, Muster Caxton

BOB Oi'll never forget the first toime oi ever 'eard that 'ay-makin'
song—dang my buttons— (*Much laughter*) Woi, look oo's 'ere!
Young Cherry Gooseman

BRENDA (*as DAISY*) Good evenin' all Is moi grand-dad 'ere?

BOB Naow, yer grand-dad's not 'ere

HETTY An' that's where yew be wrong again Garge Ol' Goose-
man's 'ere He's asleep in the corner there

HAYCRAFT Woi, so 'e be An' only man in all Barset as can still play the ould serpent

BRENDA Moi grand-dad was the finest sarpent player in the whole o' Barset 'Ere, grand-dad, wake up an' give us all a tune

General cry of "Wake up", "Give us a tune", etc, and then PERCY coolly begins playing a rustic tune, with just a suspicion of swing about it, while gradually the others join in with words and as they are singing the curtain comes down

END OF PLAY

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

A Comedy in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

MISS WEEKS
GEORGE PRITCHET
ELSIE
MONDOVI
LADY LEADMILL
MISS SELL
TAGG
MRS TAGG
SIR RUFUS GARNETT
LADY GARNETT
WILLIAM LOTLESS
MOLLY CUDDEN
ALEC ROTHBURY
VERONICA FRENHAM
DR PLUMWEATHER
PERKINS
LORD FLEETFIELD

ACT I

An evening in early autumn

ACT II

Evening, a fortnight later

ACT III

Afternoon, five days later

The Scene is the entrance lounge of the Golden Fleece Hotel,
Cheltingate Spa, an inland health resort.

The Golden Fleece—Copyright, 1948, by John Boynton Priestley

ACT I -

The Scene is the entrance lounge of the Golden Fleece Hotel, Cheltingate Spa, an inland health resort. The set is semi-circular, or a half-oval shape. Down right (actors') is a smallish door leading to a small lounge or card room. Next, right centre is the main street entrance of the hotel, big doors or a swing door set inside the big wide doorway. Next, centre back, is the curved reception desk, with registration books, pigeon-holes for letters at back, telephones, etc. On left of this, which may or may not be behind prolongation of counter, is the door that leads into the staff part of hotel and is only used by employees—called Staff Door in script. About middle of left wall is door to rest of hotel, to lift and stairs, etc—called Main Door. Between Staff Door and Main Door, near wall can be low table with lounge behind and a small chair or two, and another near wall between Main Door and Pros. Left. Another low table with chairs should be placed a little left of centre in mid-stage. Near reception desk are usual notices of picture-houses, theatre, lectures, Royal Pump Room hours and concerts, etc. The scene should suggest a stuffy comfort, and therefore must not be too modern in decoration, though not farcically Victorian.

At rise of curtain, lights are on. It is late in the evening. MISS WEEKS, reception clerk, in black, neat, not unattractive, about thirty, with a "refined" manner for guests and a much more shrewd manner for others, is behind the desk, finishing up. GEORGE PRITCHET, a rather gloomy middle-aged waiter, is hanging about the lounge, waiting for a final order or two before going off duty, and emptying an ashtray, flicking away a bit of dust, etc.

MISS WEEKS (*just audible*) And three—and twelve and six—fifteen and six—and eleven and six—twenty-seven shillings—one pound seven—and thirteen and nine—two pounds and ninepence—and four shillings—two pounds four and nine—two—four—nine (*Looks up some other figure in ledger*) Five and seven—seven and nine's one and four—six and four's ten—two—ten—four. And three, eight, two. That's five—eighteen—six. You were saying

She books it, and looks speculatively in the direction of GEORGE, who takes it as encouragement to continue a conversation that was broken off.

GEORGE (*gloomily*) Yes, two hundred pounds, that's all. Say,

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

twenty fivers and ten tenners That's all they wanted, and I couldn't lay me 'ands on it If I coul^d, look where I'd 'ave been now

MISS WEEKS (*carrying on*) Five—eighteen—six Well, where would you have been?

GEORGE (*bitterly*) In Preston Pans, with a nice business of me own

MISS WEEKS Eight—nine—five Nine—five—and eleven

GEORGE And another thing—

MISS WEEKS (*not too impatiently*) Now, just a minute Five—and eleven—ten, two and eight—and fifteen and four—ten—eighteen That's it (*Gives him all her attention now*) Well, you're not the only one If everybody had their own, I'd have five thousand pounds—at least—and a thurd share in a wholesale butcher's in Melbourne That's what my mother always says Only her brother—my uncle Fred—it was his money and business—went and lost his memory just before he died—only the lawyers said we'd never prove it So it just shows you

GEORGE (*bitterly*) It doesn't need to show me I've been shown Luck! If I told you half the things that's 'appened to me, you'd call me a liar

Telephone rings

MISS WEEKS (*at telephone*) The Golden Fleece Hotel—yes? ("Refused" now) Who is it, please? I can't quite catch Yes, the lane is very bad Oh—Mrs Gore—yes? On Saturday? Yes, of course, Mrs Gore Did you say the First Flore, Mrs Gore? Oh, Ai think so Ai'm sure that can be arranged Yes, of course, Mrs Gore On Saturday then, Mrs Gore (*Puts down telephone In ordinary voice*) That's that, Mrs Gore

GEORGE Yes, she's stayed with us before, Mrs Gore (*Pleased with himself now*) Here, did you notice that? She's stayed with us before, Mrs Gore—eh? All you want's a bit of music to it (*As this provokes no response*) Don't laugh

MISS WEEKS I'm not going to Takes more than that to make me laugh, this time of night

Yawns, then begins leisurely tidying up GEORGE goes over to Card Room door and peeps through She looks up and sees him strolling back

Um!

GEORGE (*going nearer, dropping voice*) Still there

MISS WEEKS Who are they?

GEORGE (*same tone*) Sir Something Garnett an' his wife an' that other pair—chap with no manners—

MISS WEEKS Mr Tagg?

GEORGE That's right And no class at all

MISS WEEKS They've plenty of money

GEORGE (*in despair*) I dare say Beats me how some of 'em picks it up Luck again

ELSIE, *a youngish chambermaid, with a hot-water bottle in her hand, looks in hastily through Staff Door*

ELSIE (*urgently, in loud whisper*) Miss Weeks!

MISS WEEKS Well?

ELSIE Is Molly about?

MISS WEEKS Haven't seen her She's not back on duty till eleven

ELSIE I know—but Number Eighteen's asking for her—silly old geezer I s'pose she wants Molly to sing her to sleep

GEORGE What for? You'd do for me

ELSIE (*haughtily*) Don't be personal, please, Mr Pritchett (*To* MISS WEEKS) Tell Molly when she comes Number Eighteen—S O S

Withdraws hastily

Sound of a large car outside MISS WEEKS and GEORGE look towards Street Door, and GEORGE moves forward, to look out

GEORGE (*whispering*) Don't think it's anybody new The Old Leadmill, I think (*Waits at door*)

MONDOVI, *the manager, now enters through Staff Door* He is a middle-aged Italian, dressed very formally in morning coat or dinner jacket He has a letter or two, which he tosses on desk

MONDOVI (*importantly*) On Tuesday—the second-floor suite—twenty-eight an' twenty-eight A—for Mistair an' Misses Baxter, of Birmingham They are all right Vairy reech Nice-a people

MISS WEEKS (*"refaned" again*) Yes, Mr. Mondovi And Mrs Gore rang up to ask for the usual first flore rooms for Saturday and the next fortnight I said I was sure that would be quate all raight

MONDOVI But of course We know Mrs Gor-a vary well Always spenda plenty money Nice-a People—Vairy Reech Nice-a-people

Sound of voices outside He looks, managerially

Who is-a thees?

MISS WEEKS A1 believe—Lady Leadmill

MONDOVI *comes forward, ready to smile and rub his hands* Assisted by GEORGE at door, LADY LEADMILL makes a tremendous entrance, followed by her companion, MISS SELL LADY LEADMILL is a stout, elderly woman, like a bulging-eyed, upholstered monster

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

She has a loud, wheezing voice They have been out to dinner, but are well wrapped up

MONDOVI (*now bowing and smiling*) Good-a evenin', Lady Leadmill! You enjoy your-a evenin' away from us, eh?

LADY LEADMILL No, I can't say I did very much, Mondovi They keep a very poor table up there, I must say The veal was even worse than yours

MONDOVI I 'ave spoken vary specially to chef about-a that veal, Lady Leadmill An' I am so sorry about-a your evenin'

LADY LEADMILL Then they took us to a lecture about some place or other Where was it, Miss Sell?

MISS SELL (*timidly*) The Adriatic coast, I think it was

MONDOVI (*all interest and enthusiasm*) Oh yais, I know it well Vairy nice-a Spalato—Ragusa—

LADY LEADMILL (*cutting in ruthlessly*) I dare say Couldn't make much of it myself out And the lantern slides were most peculiar Some of them had *nothing whatever* to do with it I distinctly recognised Market Harborough once—and another time Bury St Edmunds Ridiculous of the Colonel to say I dozed off How could I have recognised Bury St Edmunds if I'd dozed off? Eh, Miss Sell?

MISS SELL (*timidly*) Well, I did think once

LADY LEADMILL (*heartily*) Nonsense, you never thought at all Did you tell Horrocks to bring round the Rolls at eleven in the morning?

MISS SELL Yes, Lady Leadmill

LADY LEADMILL (*to MISS WEEKS*) Where are my letters?

MISS WEEKS Ai'm afraid there aren't any to-night, Lady Leadmill

LADY LEADMILL Are you sure?

MONDOVI (*fussily*) Now make-a quite-a sure there are no letters for Lady Leadmill.

MISS WEEKS (*who has looked again, apologetically*) No, not to-night

MONDOVI So sorry—not-a to-night-a

LADY LEADMILL (*sternly*) The posts here are most peculiar

MISS SELL (*timidly*) Yes A letter of mine—

LADY LEADMILL (*abruptly*) Good night

MISS SELL (*resignedly echoing*) Good night

MISS WEEKS (*effusively*) Good night, Lady Leadmill Good night

MONDOVI *has gone to Main Door and now stands holding it open,*

bowing and smiling, as LADY LEADHILL sails through, followed by MISS SELL

MONDOVI Good night-a, your ladyship Goo-ood night-a
Thank-a you so much Good night-a!

Meanwhile, GEORGE and MISS WEEKS have exchanged significant looks of disgust MONDOVI returns to see these They both look at him, he looks at them, is about to say something forceful, decides not to, gives a tremendous and most significant shrug, and closes his eyes

I go to bed

Marches out Staff Door

GEORGE, *looking particularly bitter, comes nearer* MISS WEEKS

GEORGE (*with bitter parody, softly*) Nice-a people! Vairy reech!

To show what she feels about it, MISS WEEKS closes her ledger with a sharp-tempered bang, and continues clearing up GEORGE, yawning, flicks a bit more ash off a table From Card Room come MR TAGG, about fifty-five, coarse-grained North-countryman, MRS TAGG, a year or two younger and a simple woman, LADY GARNETT, same age but more self-confident and genteel, and SIR RUFUS GARNETT, a thin, worrying fellow The men are in dinner jackets, and the women expensively but badly dressed

MRS TAGG (*continuing calculations after bridge*) Now are you sure we've got it all straightened out? I know I owed fifteen and six—

LADY GARNETT No, eighteen shillings, if you remember So I want another half-crown

MRS TAGG Oh—then I'll have to settle with you in the morning—unless you've got half a crown, Father

TAGG *hands over half-crown to* LADY GARNETT

SIR RUFUS Good game, I thought

MRS TAGG (*hopefully*) So did I, Sir Rufus You enjoyed it, didn't you, Father?

TAGG (*crushingly*) No, I didn't

LADY GARNETT Oh, come, Mr Tagg—

TAGG (*same tone*) I'm not blaming you But I enjoy a game o' bridge when I play with people who return my leads and don't keep their aces as if they wanted to go to bed with 'em. (*Glaring at his wife*)

SIR RUFUS Now, now, no post-mortems And as the winner, I say—what about a drink?

MRS TAGG Oo—not for me, Sir Rufus, thank you all the same.

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

I ought to get to bed, because I'm supposed to be down at the Pump Room at eight o'clock every morning

LADY GARNETT (*moving*) I think we all ought to be going to bed
So don't be long, Rufus

SIR RUFUS No, dear, just one for the road Eh, Tagg?

Moves fussily, as the two women go out through Main Door

MISS WEEKS *has now gone* GEORGE *is anxious to get this last order in, so does not bother opening the door for the women but hovers round the men, who now sit down at one of the tables*

What's it to be, eh? Say the word

TAGG (*bluntly*) Double 'Aig an' small Polly for me

SIR RUFUS An' I'll have the same, waiter

GEORGE (*briskly*) Two double 'Aigs an' Pollies, thank you, sir

Goes out Staff Door

SIR RUFUS Always enjoy a game of bridge

TAGG So do I when it's played properly But my wife won't try and learn But I was tellin' you about Fawcett Well, he puts up sixteen thousand—that is, of his own money

SIR RUFUS Well, tidy little sum

TAGG Oh—Fawcett's worth a couple o' hundred thousand pound, if he's worth a penny What's sixteen thousand to 'im? 'Owever, that's what he puts up, in the first place, and in the original issue that gives 'im a controlling interest

SIR RUFUS What—for sixteen thousand?

TAGG Ah—but look at the way they worked it Very clever! But then Fawcett *is* clever I dare say he doesn't look it, but then a lot of us don't look it, yet we manage to surprise some folk

LADY GARNETT Rufus!

Breaks off because his wife and LADY GARNETT have returned

TAGG Now, what's up now?

LADY GARNETT We can't find anybody to work the lift

MRS. TAGG I said I didn't mind walking up, but Lady Garnett wants the lift

TAGG Well, why not? We've paid for a lift, why shouldn't we 'ave it when we want it

SIR RUFUS Quite so Just slackness on somebody's part Good deal of slackness here, if you ask me

As GEORGE enters with drinks

Ah—there you are, waiter Nobody working the lift, y'know Keepin' these ladies waiting Not good enough

TAGG Time you brightened up,

GEORGE Very sorry, sir, I expect the man's gone off duty I'll tell the Night Porter It's 'is fault really

GEORGE *goes out hastily through Staff Door*

SIR RUFUS Sure you won't have anything, my dear?

LADY GARNETT (*severely*) No, and if you'd any sense, you wouldn't either, at this time of night

TAGG (*heavily*) I like a drop o' whisky before I go to bed

MRS TAGG (*proudly*) Always did, didn't you, Father? (*To LADY GARNETT*) Always did

TAGG It 'elps to settle my stomach (*To LADY GARNETT, who winces*) Might do yours too I over'eard you complainin' to my wife

LADY GARNETT *closes her eyes* GEORGE *hastily returns*

GEORGE (*hurriedly*) He's just gone through now

MRS TAGG (*who is servile to waiters*) Thank you very much

Follows after LADY GARNETT, who is stalking out

The men are now attending to their drinks GEORGE is coming closer

TAGG Well—all the best! (*Drinks*)

SIR RUFUS Cheers! (*Drinks*)

TAGG Yes—there's several of us who's a bit cleverer than we look, especially where money's concerned We've chaps on our exchange—an' to look at 'em, yer wouldn't think they were worth nupence—but—don't you make a mistake, some of 'em could write you a cheque for a quarter of a million—

GEORGE (*to SIR RUFUS*) Beg pardon, sir, will you be wanting anything else just now?

SIR RUFUS (*blankly*) Why should I?

GEORGE Only you see, sir, I'm going off duty now, an' if you *don't* want anything else, perhaps you'd like to sign for these, before I'm away

SIR RUFUS (*putting down sixpence*) There you are

GEORGE Thank you, sir Good night, gentlemen

Exits Staff Door

SIR RUFUS (*staring after him*) Bit arbitrary, that chap, wasn't he? Pay up and let me be off—sort of thing Eh?

TAGG There's one or two of 'em could do with dressing down a bit. These old women spoil 'em My wife's not much better I keep saying to her, "We're payin' for it, aren't we? See yer get yer money's

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

worth And a smile an' all ' That's what I tell her, but it does no good She's too soft

Enter, through Main door, WILLIAM LOTLESS, the Night Porter
He is a middle-aged man, with an intelligent, humorous face, grey hair, clean-shaven, and 's wearing hotel uniform

WILL (*richly*) Good evening, gentlemen Very quiet to-night again, isn't it? (*Nods and smiles and is passing them*)

SIR RUFUS Now, just a minute

WILL *stops and turns*

You're the Night Porter, aren't you?

WILL (*cheerfully*) Yes, sir William Lotless is the name, and I've been Night Porter here for—oh!—two or three years Anything I can do for you, sir?

TAGG Aren't you supposed to be working that lift when the day man goes off

SIR RUFUS Just what I was going to ask

WILL Yes, that's one of my jobs Just one of them I also supply any drinks that may be wanted, answer the door or telephone, arrange for early morning—

TAGG All right All right We don't want to know all that What we want to know is why you weren't working that lift when Lady Garnett and my wife were waiting there, a few minutes since

WILL (*confidentially*) Now, I'm sorry about that But I'll explain how it is Now the liftman goes off at eleven every night But he takes his time from the clock along there, which is always five minutes faster than *our* clock through here And the trouble is—well, we're both a bit stubborn about it

SIR RUFUS Seems a poor reason why guests should be kept waiting

WILL That I grant you, sir, I grant it like lightning And if I'd *known* the ladies were waiting, I'd have been out in a flash As I was—in a flash—when I *did* know But, you see, George the waiter here didn't let on

TAGG What's he got to do with it?

WILL Well, it's like everything else—wheels within wheels Now when I come on duty, George has to go off, and if there are any drinks wanted I serve 'em But you've just ordered some drinks—and—given him something for his trouble, I've no doubt—

SIR RUFUS Matter of fact, I did

WILL There you are Now George was after that tip, that's why he didn't tell me to come on duty before you'd ordered Not that

I'm blaming him, y'know Very natural thing to do But I'm just explaining I tell you, very interesting, this hotel business

TAGG Interesting or not, you seem to 'ave plenty to say about it

WILL (*quietly*) No, sir That, doesn't follow I can hold my tongue

Moves away with dignity and goes into space behind counter where he puts on his glasses and looks at the registration book, etc. The other two take a look at him, look at each other, rather uneasily, have a drink each

SIR RUFUS (*after a pause*) You were saying—er——?

TAGG (*with mouth-on-one-side manner*) What I'm saying is that there's a bit too much cheek and impudence about a few of 'em round 'ere for my liking

SIR RUFUS (*same manner*) Have a word with the manager in the morning, I think Got rather a pull here, matter of fact, because I know Gleason well—director of the syndicate running these hotels I think I'll just—er——

Looks round and sees WILL looking calmly in their direction over his spectacles, and hesitates and pauses

TAGG What?

SIR RUFUS Turn in, I think, eh? (*Finishes drink*)

TAGG (*getting up*) I'm ready (*Shouting across to desk*) Lift!

WILL comes across

SIR RUFUS I see East Africans are coming up Nice rise to-day Wonder if it's too late for a flutter there

TAGG (*as they move with WILL in attendance*) No But I got in weeks ago, an' I'm sitting tight on 'em for a bit yet

They go out, WILL bringing up rear, smiling rather maliciously After a short pause, telephone on desk rings Nothing happens It goes on ringing Enter, Staff Door, MOLLY CUDDEN, a pleasant-looking, good-tempered, ripe woman in a chambermaid's uniform She is carrying a rubber hot-water bottle in cover under her arm, and a small tray with a steaming hot drink in a cup on it She looks at the telephone, hesitates, puts down the tray, touches it, hesitates, then as it rings again and nobody else is coming, she answers it rather tentatively

MOLLY Golden Fleece Hotel—Mrs Ferguson? Oh, she's feeling a lot better Well, you see, I'm Molly Cudden, the chambermaid on night duty, and I've just been upstairs—and Mrs Ferguson told me earlier to look in to see if she wanted anything—so I peeped in and she was sleeping nicely Yes, I'm sure she's a lot better

Oh yes, I've heard her talk about you—and her little grandson. How is he? Isn't that nice? Good night

WILL (*enters as she puts down telephone*) Good evening, Molly

MOLLY Good evening, Will. Good job I was here to answer that. It was Mrs. Ferguson's daughter ringing up to know how she was. Well, what's amusing you, Mr. Lotless?

WILL Oh, that rude chap—Bag or Rag or Tagg or whatever they call him—I've just taken him and another chap up in the lift, after they'd practically told me to shut up, and this Rag or Tagg's very pleased with himself because he's got a lot of East Africans—

MOLLY East Africans? Black men?

WILL No, shares. And though they're going up, he says he's holding on to 'em. He's clever, he is—oh—he's not going to sell yet.

MOLLY Well, what's funny about that?

WILL (*chuckling*) The bottom'll drop out of that market very soon, you'll see, and those East Africans won't even be worth what he gave for 'em. I tell you, it took me all my time to keep my face straight when he was saying how clever he was.

MOLLY (*staring at him*) You know, I don't understand you, Mr. Lotless.

WILL Ah—that's how it should be, Mrs. Cudden. (*Points to himself*) Mystery man.

MOLLY (*ignoring this, earnestly*) But how d'you know about all these shares an' things? Who tells you?

WILL Nobody tells me. I work it out for myself. I've plenty of time on my hands, these nights here, an' I read all the financial pages in the papers and—well, I work it out for myself. I'm not always right—couldn't be, of course—an' some weeks I take a fairly big loss—like the week before last, I took a nasty tumble on Gold Coasts—must have been about a hundred and fifty thousand pounds down on that lot—

MOLLY (*staggered*) What are you talking about?

WILL Oh—it's just a sort of game I play with myself, following the market. Here, look—

Brings out note-book and shows her some pages

MOLLY (*staring*) They don't make any sense to me.

WILL (*pointing*) Now last week I'd have made about half a million—do you see?

MOLLY But I don't see.

WILL (*showing her*) It's all there, properly worked out.

MOLLY (*staring at him now*) I do think you're a funny chap, Mr Lotless I mean, all this—it's all nothing, really—isn't it?

WILL (*gravely*) All imaginary, yes, of course Just for amusement That's the only way I'd ever do it now, I promised myself that

MOLLY (*quickly*) Why did you—and when did you?

WILL (*holding up warning finger*) Ah! I've told you before, Molly Cudden, not to be too curious

As she looks offended, turning away

Now don't take offence We have our work to do—you upstairs, me down here—and we're friends, aren't we?

MOLLY (*simply*) Yes, Mr Lotless I think you're a very nice man—I've never worked with a nicer in this business—and I know that really you're very clever and not a bit like an ordinary Night Porter But, you see, when you're so different, I can't help being curious, can I?

WILL That's all right, Molly

MOLLY (*indicating tray*) Oh—goodness!—look at that And Number Eighteen's waiting for it (*Takes up tray, and prepares to go*) Oh—Mr Lotless—

WILL (*who has gone to clear small table*) Yes, Molly?

MOLLY (*hastily but impressively*) You remember I told you about all those papers my uncle sent—y'know, the uncle who died so sudden week before last—well, I've brought them for you to look at Y'know, you promised you would

WILL Yes Where are they?

MOLLY I'll bring them down, when I've taken this to Eighteen and seen if Twenty-four wants her Benger's again Shan't be long

She hurries out with tray through Main Door

WILL *takes glasses, etc., from counter through Staff Door and comes out with several newspapers He goes behind desk with these and prepares to read He can now have changed lighting, so that there is a good light on one of the tables and over the desk and not much elsewhere He can hum or whistle softly*

Enter from street VERONICA FRENHAM and DR ALEC ROTHBURY She is a very handsome girl, about twenty-eight, extremely well-dressed—she is wearing evening clothes—and with an air of luxurious sophistication He is about thirty, tall, intelligent, rather awkward, and wears an anything but immaculate dinner jacket They have only met three or four times, but he is obviously in love with her, and she knows it but does not take him very seriously

WILL (*coming forward*) Good evening, miss Good evening, Doctor

ALEC Evening, William / any message for me?

WILL No, sir

ALEC Good! Miss Frensham, have a drink

VERONICA (*hesitating*) Well, I don't know I'm going in the morning—and—

ALEC (*eagerly*) That's all the more reason why you ought to have a drink

VERONICA (*smiling*) All right

They go over to the lighted table WILL comes along

I think—a gin and lime

ALEC A gin and lime And I'll have a lager, William

WILL One gin and lime, one lager

Goes out Staff Door They light cigarettes

VERONICA (*not unpleasantly*) Well, the Wednesday dance at the Grand Hotel wasn't any improvement on the Friday dance at the Golden Fleece here, was it?

ALEC (*gloomily*) No Hoped it might be, for your sake

VERONICA Why for my sake?

ALEC I don't go to these affairs in the ordinary way I suggested it just to have a good excuse to talk to you again—and to look at you

VERONICA (*after slight pause*) Go on

ALEC Go on? I've finished

VERONICA No more compliments?

ALEC Must you have compliments?

VERONICA Not at all I rather dislike them from the sort of men who are good at it—

ALEC That's not me

VERONICA I know They're amusing coming from you because they're so obviously against the grain You're the kind of young doctor who loves being brutally frank—and rather rude In fact, I heard one of these old women here—I think it was Lady Leadmill—complaining about you She said she was going to warn your senior partner against you when he came back

ALEC (*butterfly*) Senior partner! Don't flatter me Old Plumweather's my boss, who pays me by the month And the only reason why I'm able to stay in this hotel is that Plumweather stays here, keeps a consulting room here, and they put a bed for me in the little spare room next to it Otherwise I couldn't afford it

VERONICA And what did you say to poor old Lady Leadmill?

ALEC She came moaning about not being able to sleep, so I told her she was grossly over-eating

She laughs

No, it's not funny It's disgusting The old woman treats herself as if she was a Strasbourg goose Tea and bread-and-butter at eight-thirty At nine-thirty a large breakfast, and at eleven-thirty perhaps coffee and a cake or two At one-thirty a three- or four-course lunch At four-thirty she tucks into toast and sandwiches and cake At eight-thirty she's eating a six-course dinner At ten-thirty—

WILL has now arrived with the drinks

WILL (*putting them down*) Gin and lime Lager

ALEC Thanks I'll settle with you later, William

WILL Certainly, sir

Goes back to desk and buries himself behind newspaper The other two drink

VERONICA But even if she does over-eat, why should you be rude to the silly old thing? What does it matter?

ALEC It wouldn't matter if there was just one of her, but there are thousands and thousands of her—like—like stuffed old frogs—crocodiles—dinosaurs This country's full of 'em And there they are, doing no good to anybody, not even to themselves—and because they have the money, demanding services all day long from other people That's what you see everywhere in this country—the living waiting upon the half-dead

VERONICA That's a curious thing for a doctor to say After all, isn't he one of the living waiting on the half-dead?

ALEC I'm not talking about the sick I'm talking about these people who have money, appetites, prejudices, and nothing else And I say the place is full of 'em, and we can't get on with anything worth doing because they demand our services

VERONICA Nobody compels you to give your services

ALEC (*bitterly*) Oh! Now, my dear Veronica—

VERONICA (*coolly*) I am not your dear Veronica, Dr Rothbury

ALEC (*as before*) I know you're not, but unfortunately for my peace of mind, I've spent the last week imagining you were

VERONICA And you never told me! Now why have you?

ALEC (*through his teeth*) Because I seem to have been silly enough to have—what do you people call it—?

VERONICA Oh—we people call it all sorts of things

ALEC Don't be so damned flippant Just remember even if this isn't serious for you, it is for me

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

VERONICA (*sharply*) Now wait a moment (*Smiles beguilingly at him*) Look at me

ALEC (*groans*) I don't want to look at you (*But he does*) I know You're beautiful I've admitted it

VERONICA Don't be so grudging Don't you like it?

ALEC (*muttering*) I do—worse luck!

VERONICA (*coolly*) All money, y'know These clothes—and I assure you I wouldn't look at all the same in any old thing—they cost money Figure, hands, hair, face—all cost money too Looking really attractive is an expensive full-time job

ALEC (*miserably*) All right, you've won And don't think it hadn't occurred to me I've been chewing it over for the last week and not enjoying the taste of it

Telephone rings WILL answers it, then calls

WILL It's the Cottage Hospital for you, doctor

ALEC Right (*To VERONICA*) Just a minute

Goes to telephone She watches him, smiling a little

Yes, Dr Rothbury here I see Yes, I'll come round

Returns to VERONICA, who rises

Sorry, but I'll have to go round to the hospital Don't suppose I'll be long, if you'd care to wait

VERONICA Too late And I'm catching the nine-fifteen to town in the morning So I must say good-bye—now

ALEC (*awkwardly*) Yes—well—

VERONICA (*smiling, holding out her hand*) Good-bye, then And thank you—for—

ALEC (*bitterly*) Trying to entertain you—eh?

VERONICA (*coolly*) When you're older and have work you enjoy more, you won't be so arrogant and aggressive, you might—

ALEC (*roughly*) I might be like one of these bedside pussycats (*Stares at her*) Well, it's good-bye And I wish now you'd never set foot in this place

VERONICA (*a little closer, smiling provocatively*) Oh—why?

ALEC (*savagely*) All right, if you will ask for it

Seizes her roughly and kisses her soundly.

Good-bye

VERONICA (*coldly*) That was very stupid

ALEC (*hastily*) I know I am stupid Good-bye

He hurries out

She watches him go, then takes bag from table rather slowly and thoughtfully, while MOLLY enters through Main Door

MOLLY (*cheerfully*) Good evening, miss I heard you'd gone

VERONICA (*pleasantly*) No, I go in the morning You're not on duty in the mornings this week, are you?

MOLLY No, miss Nights, instead They usually give me the late turn I don't mind it, and the younger ones hate it

VERONICA (*who has taken five shillings out of her bag*) Thank you for looking after me so nicely

MOLLY (*receiving tip*) Oh—thank you, miss It was a pleasure, I'm sure Thank you for the shoes You gave me no trouble at all, and it's a nice change having somebody who's young an' nice-lookin' an' with all their health an' strength I hope you'll come back here

VERONICA (*smiling*) I'm afraid I shan't, y'know Cheltingate isn't exactly my style

MOLLY (*earnestly*) Well, I know it's a bit—sort of—stuffy an'—an'—purse-proud, but for all that it's very nice sometimes Often when I've the afternoon off I just sit down in the gardens when the band's playin'—and if the sun's shining an' the flowers are out an' the birds hopping round you, it's as pretty as a picture, an' I just sit, half in a kind of dream, if you follow me—an'—well, I wouldn't want anything nicer

VERONICA Lovely! Good night, Molly (*Pauses, hesitating*) Do you know Dr Rothbury?

MOLLY I should think I do Lives here, you see Doesn't like it, you know Wants to be off He's a bit silly, like all young fellows, but he's a grand young man when you get to know him—very kind and clever with it too On at the Cottage Hospital, they swear by him (*Confidentially, but not impudently*) I think you rather fancy him yourself, don't you?

VERONICA Good lord—no In fact, I'm rather annoyed with him

MOLLY Yes, but what's that? You can be annoyed with them just because you're interested, can't you?

VERONICA You *can*, but it doesn't follow that you are Well, good night, Molly

MOLLY (*holding door open*) Good night, miss

VERONICA *goes out*

MOLLY *comes in and in her tidy way picks the two glasses from the table and goes to counter, behind which WILL is still buried in his newspaper She waits for a moment, regarding him—or what she can see of him—with humorous, affectionate impatience*

Well, I wouldn't call you ⁵very sociable

WILL (*lowering the paper*) ' I'll explain

MOLLY I never knew such a chap for explaining Here, what about these? Shall I take 'em through? (*Indicating the glasses she holds*)

WILL (*taking them*) No—and many thanks for bringing 'em, Mrs Cudden—but they'll do here for the time being (*Puts them down at back, then comes forward*) I'll explain Now—the reason I'd got so buried behind that paper wasn't that I was specially interested in it, although I see that Harrin and his gang are making a big play for Heavy Industrials and may catch a cold——

MOLLY Now don't start on about shares and markets or I won't listen Tell me why you were hiding behind your paper

WILL Because I'd been busy effacing myself Being here on duty, of course, as I have to be, but at the same time, as you might say, being *not* here

MOLLY Why?

WILL Because the handsome young lady who has just left us had been having a little private talk—a tête-a-tête—with our friend Dr Rothbury

MOLLY Ah, that's why she asked about him I'll bet you listened to all they said, you an' your newspaper! Didn't you? You ought to be ashamed What did they say?

WILL He's gone on her He's smitten He's done for Told her so

MOLLY (*delighted*) Isn't that nice? But I've always said about Dr Rothbury—let the Right Girl come along—and you'll see

WILL I can never understand why you women want everybody sorted out in pairs and tied up and put to bed—as if you were running a lot of Noah's Arks Nature's bad enough without all you women egging her on all the time

MOLLY (*earnestly*) I know, but look what a lot of happiness it brings too And I say—take a chance For I believe in happiness, Mr Lotless Plenty of people don't—they pretend to but they don't, not right down inside themselves—they're against it and against people who are happy But not me (*Pause*) Now what did she say?

WILL Oh well, it didn't go your way at all, this affair didn't So don't start fancying anything for them It's all off Money again, you see He hasn't any She's got too much

MOLLY Has she? News to me An' she only gave me five shillings

WILL Maybe But you ought to know by this time—the richer they are, the less they give you. And why? I'll explain

MOLLY You needn't I'm thinking about them poor silly young

things If I'd known, I'd have said a lot more to her I think it's a shame A fine clever young man like that An' after telling her that he worshipped the ground she walked on'

WILL He didn't say that I'll bet nobody's ever said that outside of a sloppy story

MOLLY An' that's where you're wrong again, Mr Clever Because it was said to me—once—years ago—when I was only a girl—by a friend of my brother's He said he worshipped the ground I walked on

WILL He must have been soft in the head

MOLLY He was a bit I can see him now He had them very light eyelashes, and he was a barber and his name was Cyril But for all that, that didn't stop him, afterwards, from marrying a widow fifteen years older than he was—she owned three grocers' shops—

Hotel internal bells rings WILL answers it

WILL (at telephone) Yes, madam I'll tell her (*Puts down*) Well, there's another who worships the ground you walk on—Number Eighteen—and she wants another hot-water bottle How many does that make?

MOLLY Four The poor old thing can't sleep, and she wants an excuse to tell me all over again about her daughter in India

Moves towards Staff Door

WILL If she'd gone with her to India she wouldn't want so many hot-water bottles (*Just watching MOLLY as she goes*) What about those papers your uncle left you that you wanted me to go through? Where are they?

MOLLY (*hastily*) I brought them down I'll give you 'em now

She hurries out He puts on his spectacles, takes out his pipe and prepares to sit not at desk, but at a table outside MOLLY comes out with old worn despatch case or something of the kind

Here you are I expect it's all rubbish really—it looked rubbish to me—but you might have a look, Mr Lotless An' I'll bring some tea in when I come down

WILL (*taking case*) That's the idea, Molly And I'll give this stuff my very best attention

She goes out Staff Door—while he settles down to look through case, taking papers out and preparing to examine them in a business-like fashion Before he has done more than look at the first document, he is interrupted by the return of ALEC

ALEC Miss Frensham turned in, I suppose, as soon as I'd gone?

WILL She did, doctor

ALEC (*more to himself than to WILL*) I might write her a note

WILL (*coolly*) I shouldn't

ALEC Oh—why?

WILL If they're really interested, they always write to you If they're not, then why should you bother writing? Besides it's only committing yourself

ALEC (*staring*) I believe you're right, though I don't know that that's any real excuse for not minding your own business

WILL (*coolly*) I've wondered about that myself Never could make up my mind

ALEC (*still staring*) Well, it's my turn to butt in now Come here, William my friend No, closer—that's it Take off your glasses

Has WILLIAM standing before him in strong light He now takes from his pocket about half a sheet of newspaper, folded, and puts it across the lower half of WILLIAM'S face, in such a way that he can look at the upper half of the face and at a photograph—of a bearded man—in the newspaper, at the same time

My God, I believe you are!

WILLIAM *snatches the paper, gives it a quick startled glance*
Hey! that's not mine

Trying to get it back

WILL (*determined*) I don't care whose it is, you don't get it back
(*Stuffs it into his pocket*)

ALEC (*amused, not unpleasantly*) Well, well, well!

WILL (*quietly*) I might say, I've been expecting this

ALEC Why?

WILL Because the other day I caught sight of a fellow who used to be a warder at Maidstone when I was there And he saw me too And recognised me

ALEC He thought he did He told me about it to-night—he's just been taken on as an orderly at the hospital—and when he described you, I thought it might be you, so he gave me that cutting and photograph so I might make sure

WILL I see What's his name?

ALEC Robbins

WILL That's the chap

ALEC (*lighting a cigarette*) Better tell me the story, William Or should I call you Mr Blofield now?

WILL William's my name anyhow, but I'd just as soon you didn't

use it if you're going to be funny about this, doctor. It isn't very funny to me, y'know

ALEC Oh—come off it. I'm not getting at you. I don't give a damn about your having been in jail. You've always seemed to me a decent fellow, and that's all I care about. Tell me what happened.

WILL In 1916, after I'd caught a packet on the Somme, I was discharged from the army and got a job in a shipping office. For the next four years that shipping business was a proper Monte Carlo, and I was good at it—I'm a born gambler, believe me, doctor—and when I jumped out before the crash, I'd got some real money to play with. By 1930 I was worth over a million—at least, on paper—but there was another slump on top of us, and I'd got to take bigger chances. I took one that didn't come off. It was a question of making some securities do more work for me than they were entitled to do, bit of conjuring and juggling really. I'd done it before, of course, but this time I wasn't quick enough. If I'd been just a shade quicker, I'd be in the House of Lords now instead of Night Porter at the Golden Fleece, Cheltingate.

ALEC I wonder if you've missed much.

WILL Probably not. But I'm not complaining. I'm just telling you. Well, I did five years in Maidstone. When I came out, I didn't grow my moustache and little beard again, and I changed me name to Lotless—

ALEC Any particular reason?

WILL (*grimming*) Yes, because when I came out I'd a lot less than when I went in.

ALEC Why didn't you tuck away a nice little fortune?

WILL (*grimly*) Because I married. Yes, as they used to say, Bill Blofield married well. Out of the top drawer. And that's where all that was left of the money went. Even before I'd landed myself at the Old Bailey, she'd been a bit—well—careless, shall we say? Then once I was inside, she ratted on me good and hard. Couldn't get a divorce so changed her name by deed-poll. I thought once, after I came out, of going down to Cannes and just quietly screwing her neck round, but then I thought, "Oh—let her rot with it. It'll never do her any good, that money."

ALEC But how did you get here?

WILL When I was nearly broke, I ran into a fellow who used to be a head-waiter at the Ambassador. I'd given him many a fiver. He was managing the Bournemouth Hotel belonging to this syndicate. Put me in as a porter. Then I was moved up here.

ALEC Doesn't anybody ever spot you?

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WILL No, why should they? When you catch sight of a clean-shaven night porter called Lótless, you're not naturally reminded of a bearded speculator called Blofield, especially as he disappeared years ago. That chap Robbins is different, because he often saw me inside. You get to know faces in there all right.

ALEX Well, prison didn't seem to do you any harm.

WILL In a way, it did me good. I was nearly a nervous wreck when I went in, couldn't eat, couldn't sleep. When I came out, I could eat anything, sleep anywhere at any time, and was as cool as a cucumber. Bit of a philosopher, you might say. But all the same, there's a piece of you dies in those places. Five years of it puts fifty years on to you—somewhere inside you. You're not young any more. You've got your face turned towards the graveyard. Funny, but that's how it works.

ALEC And no more gambling on the market for you, eh?

WILL I promised myself *Never Again*. Just as I never take a drink—I don't know if you've ever noticed. I said—no more quick strong drinks—and no more conjuring tricks with paper money. But I often manipulate the market a bit just in theory, y'know, to pass the time and keep my mind lively.

Enter MOLLY, through Staff Door, with tray with tea for two on it and a few sandwiches

ALEC Hello, Molly!

MOLLY Hello, doctor, would you like a cup of tea with us?

ALEC No thanks, I'm turning in. Too late already, listening to William's profound discourse. I'll have a sandwich, though. (*Takes one from tray she has put down on table*)

WILL I was telling the doctor how I amuse myself pretending I'm on the stock market.

MOLLY (*pouring out tea*) I know. Silly, I call it.

ALEC (*eating*) I'm with you, Molly.

MOLLY I'm not sure you've got a lot o' sense either, Dr Roth-bury. Not from something I've heard.

ALEC Oh, what's that?

MOLLY Never you mind.

ALEC I don't mind. And it's time I went to bed. Good night. (*He goes upstairs*)

WILL and MOLLY Good night, doctor.

They now settle down cosily with their tea, with MOLLY's case handy

MOLLY Have you looked through these yet?

WILL I was just starting (*Tastes tea*) Nice cup of tea, Mrs Cudden

MOLLY I'm glad you like it, Mr Lotless

WILL (*beginning to turn over documents*) Now then! Two receipts Licence for a gun Menu of the Annual Dinner at the Red Lion—good blow-out too——

MOLLY Yes, I've heard my uncle tell of them dinners Famous, they were

WILL (*still examining the papers*) What was this uncle of yours?

MOLLY He was head gamekeeper for Sir George Curtigan at Charlton Chase, and then afterwards he was a sort of bailiff Sir George thought the world of him I used to go an' stay when I was a kid It was lovely All among thick woods

WILL (*turning the papers faster*) Nothing here, y'know Old licences and bills and receipts—just junk, might as well be burnt Hello! (*Stares*) No, he sold 'em Evidently owned a few shares in his time, your uncle

MOLLY Well, you see Sir George was a big man in the City——

WILL Yes, I know he was I remember him

MOLLY You do?

WILL Yes, I do, silly as I look

MOLLY I didn't mean that, I——

WILL (*cutting in*) Never mind that What about Sir George? Did he put your uncle on to things now and again?

MOLLY Yes, that's just what I was going to tell you

WILL (*grinning*) I know it was

MOLLY Well, next time when I've something of my own to tell, just let me tell it and don't take the words out of my mouth It's most aggravating

WILL (*still turning them over*) I'll try not to do it again Bought himself a nice grave in good time, I see Another blow-out at the Red Lion—steak, kidney and oyster pudding this time County Court summons

MOLLY Eh?

WILL No, not for him Solicitor's letters—six-and-eight a time—worth nothing now Long letter from Tasmania——

MOLLY My Aunt Millie—his sister, you see——

WILL Photographs now Wedding groups——

MOLLY (*suddenly alarmed*) Here——

WILL Why, this is you

She gives a sharp cry and then is silent

He looks at it quietly, then passes it over She stares at it a moment, then turns her face away He looks at her curiously Then we hear that she is crying quietly

MOLLY (*after a pause, sniffing*) I didn't know that was still there

WILL Sorry if I've started anything

MOLLY It was just—seeing myself—twenty years ago—so bright an' happy, thinking it was all going to be wonderful—silly young donkey!

WILL (*quietly*) It wasn't wonderful?

MOLLY No—it was a proper mess

WILL Same here

MOLLY (*staring*) You as well! Why, I always thought you were one o' them born bachelors

WILL Perhaps I was But for all that I went and said "I will" Like you (*Goes on turning again*) Certificates now Birth, marriage, death You can burn nearly all this stuff, except the family souvenirs, if you want to keep them Hello! (*Stares, and turns over several share certificates*) Wait a minute, now, wait a minute!

Holds the certificates near the light and examines them carefully Then, satisfied they are all right, looks from them to the wide-eyed MOLLY

Great suffocating Moses! (*Then laughs from excitement*)

MOLLY Now what on earth's the matter with you? (*She takes up the certificates and looks at them*) Leadenhall and Lombard Trust A hundred shares A hundred shares

WILL (*trying to repress his excitement*) Yes, five hundred shares in a little company called the Leadenhall and Lombard Trust

MOLLY (*with growing excitement*) But—are they worth something—Mr Lotless?

WILL (*same tone*) Now a feature of these particular shares—I'll bet my boots—is that their transfer was never registered And they're about ten years old

MOLLY (*impatiently*) Oh don't go on talking that silly stuff Tell me—are they worth anything? What is this company? What does it do?

WILL (*triumphantly*) I'll tell you For the last few years the Leadenhall and Lombard Trust has been operating as a parent or holding company (*He now takes out a pencil and begins making calculations*)

MOLLY (*impatiently*) I don't know what that means, but could I sell them and how much would I get?

WILL (*still calculating*) This kind of company simply exists to hold shares in other companies

MOLLY (*angrily*) Stop it! What could I get? Fifty pounds? A hundred pounds?

WILL (*still busy with figures*) Don't be silly!

MOLLY (*furiously*) You pay attention and answer me

WILL (*not noticing her*) I'm busy

With a cry of fury she seizes the plate that held the sandwiches and breaks it over his head. He looks at her in a dazed fashion. She is penitent at once.

MOLLY (*miserably*) You see, I told you I'd a terrible temper. Nobody'll believe I have but I have. Oh—I'm sorry, William. Have I hurt you?

WILL (*still dazed*) No. I don't think so.

MOLLY (*putting a hand on his head*) It's only a little bump. No, it's quite a big one.

WILL (*still dazed, thoughtful*) I've always had that one. (*With sudden excitement now*) Listen, Molly, I want you to let me handle this business for you.

MOLLY These shares?

WILL (*excitedly*) Yes. It's a ticklish situation. Take 'em to one of these provincial stockbrokers or solicitors, and the clever boys in London would have 'em tied in knots in no time. But this is just my line. Believe me, Molly, I'm a wizard at it. Give me a hold like this over some of those boys, and I'm Buccaneer Bill again. You'll see. Now, Molly, we've been good pals. Will you let me handle it? All for your sake. I mean it.

MOLLY (*who has never seen him like this*) Yes, of course, William. I trust you.

WILL (*jumping up*) That's a good girl. And—oh!—what a bomb-shell! Where's that London Telephone Directory of ours?

MOLLY (*bewildered*) But you can't start telephoning people now?

WILL (*going to office*) Can't I? Don't you worry. The Cudden-Lotless syndicate is going to conduct its operations in the market at midnight. Trunks? And just watch the feathers flying! (*Chuckles as he hastily searches directory*) Trunks. Cheltingate 175. a personal call for Mr. Percival Vandermore, Mayfair 67325. that's it.

She stares at him as she mechanically puts together the tea things, etc.

MOLLY (*anxiously*) William?

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WILL (*still searching*) Yes?

MOLLY (*anxiously*) Are you sure you're all right? I mean, you did get an awful bang on the head, didn't you?

WILL (*chuckling*) Hardly, noticed it I was too busy thinking Just leave it all to me (*Into telephone*) Hello, Mr Vandermore Yes, I know it's late Well, it is important business You see, I represent a little syndicate that owns five hundred shares in the Leadenhall and Lombard Trust Oh, no, it's not impossible they're here in front of me the transfer wasn't registered, you see yes, it does make a difference, doesn't it? Oh no, you don't too easy you see, Vandermore, this is Bill Blofield yes, that makes a difference too Yes, I'm jumping in with both feet No, I can't come up and you can't ring me I'll ring you at one o'clock sharp and I'll have a proposition to put to you then All right then, think it over, and then we'll get down to tricks all right, Vandermore, at one o'clock

He puts down phone and looks triumphantly at MOLLY, who is standing staring at him, open-mouthed, carrying tray

Well, Mrs Cudden, we've started The Cudden-Lotless syndicate is in the market

MOLLY (*bewildered*) You know, Mr Lotless, you seem—quite different And who's Bill Blofield?

WILL Oh—it's just a name I thought he'd know

MOLLY But you haven't told me yet if I could sell those shares and what they'd be worth

WILL What they're worth now is nothing to what they'll bring in before I've done with them You wait

MOLLY (*wistfully*) Yes But there are some things I'd like to buy, that's all, and I just wondered if I was a bit better off, that's all

WILL Bit better-off?

House telephone rings He answers it

Twenty-seven? Yes, madam Yes, I'm sure she can She'll bring it up in a few minutes (*Puts it down*) Twenty-seven can't sleep and wonders if you could make her a cup of Bengers

MOLLY (*backing into door with tray*) Yes, of course I can. (*Hesitates, then*) How much do you think?

WILL Only a cup

MOLLY No, silly, I mean me

WILL Oh—well, God knows what we can build it up to if I handle Vandermore and his pals properly and really get going You don't

know where it'll end (*Casually*) But at the moment, I suppose those shares of yours are worth about two hundred and fifty thousand pounds

MOLLY *gives a cry as the curtain falls quickly*

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END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE *Same as Act One*

Late on a Friday evening, two weeks later

At rise, full lighting on scene This time Main Door is wide open, showing corridor to rest of hotel behind it, and through this door we hear sound of dance band, but it is obviously at the other end of the hotel MISS WEEKS is behind her counter, as before GEORGE is waiting Two young couples—men in their dinner jackets, girls in simple evening clothes—are having drinks, in separate pairs, at tables near wall Certain properties—a toy balloon, paper hat, false nose—on the tables suggest a mild spirit of carnival The two couples converse, but cannot be heard

GEORGE (*crossing over to MISS WEEKS*) I don't know how they're doing along there to-night, but not many of 'em's coming in here

MISS WEEKS They mostly go and sit out in the far lounge

GEORGE (*bitterly*) Yes, what there is of 'em Birthday carnival! Whose birthday?

MISS WEEKS Oh—that's just an excuse

GEORGE (*bitterly*) An excuse for what?

MISS WEEKS (*severely*) To try and give people an enjoyable evening and get a little extra custom

GEORGE (*same as before*) Carnival dance! Ten bobs' worth of paper 'ats an' false noses among fifty people!

MISS WEEKS Better than nothing What do you want?

GEORGE Me? I'll tell you what I want I want to put my feet up, read an Edgar Wallace, and get down three or four bottles o' Guinness

MISS WEEKS (*not impressed*) Well, it's a good thing we're not all alike, isn't it?

GEORGE No, it isn't It's a bad thing Save a lot of bother if we were all alike Trouble about you girls is—you don't think for yourselves

As he is turning away from counter, MONDOVI enters through Staff Door He is in evening dress, and very important

MONDOVI Oh!—Jorj-a—you are notta busy a moment, eh?

GEORGE No, sir

MONDOVI Then take a tray-a In there

GEORGE goes through Staff Door

Not-a finish yet (*Referring to dancing, which can still be heard—looks at watch*) How many in there to-night?

MISS WEEKS Well, I'm not quite sure, Mr Mondovi, because nearly all the outside lot come in the other way, but I think, including our own guests, about fifty

MONDOVI Fifty—no good! Not a complete-a wash-out, but no good

MISS WEEKS Well, you see, Mr Mondovi, the sort of people who come to Cheltingate aren't very lively—are they?

MONDOVI (*bitterly*) I think all they want is to eat four-a big bad meals a day, to sleep, to drink-a the smelly waters

MISS WEEKS looks shocked GEORGE enters carrying tray with bottles, glasses, etc

GEORGE Here we are, sir

MONDOVI To the small-a private room, through the Card-a Room

GEORGE crosses towards Card Room MONDOVI turns to MISS WEEKS

If one of the girls comes with-a tray tell 'er small-a private room through Card-a Room I give my little supper in there (*Follows GEORGE across*)

They go out Telephone rings

MISS WEEKS (*at telephone*) Golden Fleece Mr Lotless?
No, he's not here yet Well, you'll have to ring later

As she puts down telephone ELSIE enters carrying large tray with napkins covering cold food, plates, etc

Through the Card Room, Mr Mondovi said

ELSIE (*grumbling*) I call this being put on Came down, 'cos I'd finished, an' they said, "'Ere, take this in" They don't ask the waiters to 'elp me with my beds, do they?

As she goes across, GEORGE comes out and holds door for her, grinning

GEORGE (*sardonically*) It does me good to see yer sweet smiling face

One of the men of the two young couples beckons him across, and in dumb show he receives payment for the drink and a tip This young couple go out through Main Door ELSIE comes out Card Room and crosses to MISS WEEKS

ELSIE (*speaking near Staff Door*) What's the idea in there?

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MISS WEEKS (*in rather superior tone*) Mr Mondovi is giving supper to a few of our guests

ELSIE What for? Don't they get enough to eat already?

MISS WEEKS Just a stunt Part of the Birthday Carnival idea It isn't anybody's birthday, of course

ELSIE Oh yes, it is It's Molly's She told me this morning They're doing all this (*indicating general arrangements*) for her, only they don't know it

Now she sees SIR RUFUS and TAGG, who enter slowly together through Main Door, deep in talk SIR RUFUS is wearing an absurd false nose and TAGG a silly little hat They have obviously forgotten about them ELSIE giggles

Oh, crumbs! Look what's blown in!

Exit Staff Door, giggling

SIR RUFUS (*as they come forward together*) You mean to say—they never intended to pay a dividend?

TAGG (*very solemnly*) 'Course they didn't That was the idea from the start And then, what 'appened?

SIR RUFUS Well, obviously the stock went down——

TAGG Now, who's telling this? They says "Well, gentlemen, we've 'ad an offer from the Pranto Company to take over the property and machinery, an' it's the best we can do——"

SIR RUFUS Yes—neat, very neat! And they're all in the Pranto concern, eh?

TAGG They were all in the syndicate that 'as a controlling interest in the Pranto An' they got the whole property and machinery for twenty-five thousand I tell yer, they were clever, that lot

SIR RUFUS Obviously It reminds me of a tricky little bit of business that I came across about two years ago——

TAGG And that isn't all they did neither

Is interrupted by MONDOVI coming out of Card Room, all smiles and little bows

MONDOVI This-a way, if you please Lady Garnett, Mrs Tagg, they are coming, of course?

TAGG They're following on And I don't mind tellin' yer I'm feeling fairly peckish

They go into Card Room, MONDOVI remaining at door Second couple go out Street Door GEORGE clears away their glasses

LADY GARNETT, *in evening dress and carrying some carnival toy, enters Main Door with DR PLUMWEATHER, an elderly doctor with a very smooth manner, in a dinner jacket They are talking very*

confidentially and halt in the centre to finish what they have to say before joining MONDOVI

DOCTOR PLUMWEATHER I can't believe it

LADY GARNETT At first I didn't want to say anything, but then I felt you ought to know, Dr Plumweather

DR PLUMWEATHER (*solemn whisper*) And I assure you, Lady Garnett, I'm very much indebted to you Of course I *had* other—er—criticisms, as you can well imagine

LADY GARNETT Yes, I thought you would have

DR PLUMWEATHER (*pompously*) The fact is, Dr Rothbury is totally unsuited to this class of work I don't say he's lacking in general ability He's not I don't say he's not a hard worker He is But—well—he's—

LADY GARNETT (*prompting him*) Crude

DR PLUMWEATHER (*archly*) I won't say it, I won't say it—

LADY GARNETT (*also archly*) Etiquette?

DR PLUMWEATHER Etiquette, my dear lady But—(*solemnly, confidential now*)—between ourselves, that young man won't be here much longer I've made up my mind

LADY GARNETT You're very wise Not the Cheltingate type of doctor at all, and never will be Ah!—Now are we all here?

She has moved over towards MONDOVI, the doctor following They remain there at door LADY LEADMILL, carrying a sausage-shaped balloon, enters, followed by MRS TAGG and MISS SELL, who are wearing very incongruous paper hats All are in evening dress

GEORGE closes Main Door after this entrance

MRS TAGG (*nervously ending a long account*) So now I rest them whenever I can

LADY LEADMILL (*who clearly thinks nothing of MRS TAGG, stopping*) Rest what?

MRS TAGG (*whispering*) My feet

LADY LEADMILL (*aloud, surprised*) Your feet!

MISS SELL (*timidly, trying to help*) Mrs Tagg was telling us the trouble she's had with—her feet

LADY LEADMILL (*awfully*) Indeed! Enquire if there are any letters

MRS TAGG (*flustered*) Oh—yes—certainly

Turns and then sees that it is MISS SELL who is obeying the order, going to counter

Oh—I see, yes—I'm sorry

MISS SELL (*returning*) No, Lady Leadmill, no letters

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

LADY LEADMILL (*sternly*) The posts here are most peculiar

MRS TAGG Yes, I had a—

LADY LEADMILL *Most peculiar* Miss Sell, I think you've worn that paper hat quite long enough now

MISS SELL (*snatching it off*) Oh—yes, I'd forgotten

MRS TAGG *takes hers off too, then looks at it admiringly and wistfully*

LADY LEADMILL You had better go upstairs now, Miss Sell, as you were not invited to Mondovi's little supper party—

MISS SELL Yes, Lady Leadmill

LADY LEADMILL But don't go to bed, as I may want you

MISS SELL Yes, Lady Leadmill Good night, Mrs Tagg

Goes upstairs

MRS TAGG Good night, Miss Sell (*Looking wistfully at hat*) I think it's so pretty

LADY LEADMILL (*sternly*) For a young girl, no doubt

MRS TAGG (*bravely*) Well, I'm not a young girl (*Puts the hat on again*) But I was once

LADY LEADMILL (*moving forward*) Indeed!

MRS TAGG (*following on*) Yes, and sometimes even now I still feel a young girl

She takes a pin and bursts the sausage balloon that LADY LEADMILL is carrying LADY LEADMILL turns and glares suspiciously at her, while she looks innocent

LADY GARNETT and DR PLUMWEATHER have now gone in LADY LEADMILL, MRS TAGG follow, the latter closing Card Room door behind her

GEORGE (*going over to MISS WEEKS, who is now clearing up*) See that Mrs Tagg burst old Leadface's balloon?

MISS WEEKS (*looking up*) She didn't!

GEORGE She did Quite right too! She ought to 'ave 'ad her balloon busted long since

Enter through Street Door PERKINS of the Gazette, about forty, moustache, untidy rain-coat or mac, bowler hat towards back of his head, and puffs great volume of smoke all the time from his pipe Manner half gauche, half impudent GEORGE sees him

Yes, sir?

PERKINS No, sir Perkins of the Gazette I want to have a word with this young lady

GEORGE (*bitterly*) Good night, all

Goes out Staff Door

PERKINS (*announcing himself to her*) Perkins of the *Gazette*

MISS WEEKS What, again?

PERKINS Well, I haven't got anywhere yet I tried the Grand and the Queen's Nobody there knew what I was talking about

MISS WEEKS Well, I told you I didn't know what you were talking about, didn't I?

PERKINS You did But now—I've an idea

Pauses, but she shows no interest

Wouldn't you like to hear what my idea is?

MISS WEEKS (*still clearing up*) No, not particularly

PERKINS Thanks very much Well, my idea is—I may have been enquiring too early

MISS WEEKS You don't call this too early, do you? We think it's late, up here

PERKINS You haven't got my point If it's all supposed to be happening late at night, none of you people on day duty might know about it, anyhow

Enter WILL, through Staff Door

WILL Good evening, Miss Weeks

MISS WEEKS Good evening, William

PERKINS (*heartily*) Good evening, William

WILL (*administering gentle snub*) Good evening, sir

MISS WEEKS (*finished now*) This is our Night Porter, so you'd better try him now

WILL What's this about?

MISS WEEKS Don't ask me I've given it up Good night

Goes, Staff Door

WILL (*comes forward*) Well now, what can I do for you?

PERKINS My name's Perkins and I represent the *Gazette*

WILL From London?

PERKINS The London *Daily Gazette*, of course, but I'm not from London I'm at the Manchester office Cheltingate comes in our area, you see

WILL Yes, I see Why don't you sit down?

PERKINS Good idea! Well, our London office had got hold—
(*Sits left of table*) Here, haven't I seen you before somewhere?

WILL (*standing*) If you've stayed at this hotel and come in late, you probably have

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

PERKINS No, never stayed here Haven't I seen you somewhere else?

WILL Not to my knowledge, Mr Perkins

PERKINS No?

WILL No

They stand looking at each other, then PERKINS crosses back and sits

PERKINS Well, it doesn't matter This is the point (*Confidentially*) Our London office has got hold of a queer story—or the beginnings of a queer story, for that's about all it is yet—and the idea is that there's a big financial syndicate, which is crashing the market in a very grand style, operating from an hotel here in Cheltingate (*He takes cigarette out of packet out of his pocket, then offers one to WILL*)

WILL Nothing surprising in that Lot of rich men stay here, y'know

PERKINS Cigarette?

WILL Oh, thank you, sir

He fumbles in his pocket for matches

You have to be pretty well-off before you need these waters and baths Hot sulphur water comes in with the sur-tax

PERKINS Yes, but that's not all According to our assistant City Editor, who's a bright lad and keeps his ears open, these chaps here, who are very hot stuff, do all their business late at night

WILL What business? Stocks and shares?

PERKINS Yes, big gambling on the Exchange

WILL How can they do that late at night? The Exchange isn't open

PERKINS Oh—they've got people doing their buying and selling for 'em in London during the day, naturally, but *they* do *their* work—send their instructions and all that—late at night It was a chap he knows at a big broker's who let it slip to him So London asked me to come and get the story

WILL Well, all I can say is, that if anybody here was spending half the night telephoning to London—about stocks and shares or anything else—I'd be the first to know about it, wouldn't I?

PERKINS Stands to reason Yes

WILL Yes

PERKINS Yes

WILL And I can assure you—nobody comes an' asks me to get these London numbers

PERKINS They don't, eh?

WILL No, they don't

Telephone rings sharply

Excuse me (*Goes—at telephone*) Golden Fleece Oh yes
yes, it is, but ring me in about an hour I know, but ring me
in an hour's time all right (*Puts it down, and comes back Casu-*
ally) Friend o' mine—wants a chat

PERKINS Late, isn't he?

WILL He's another night bird, like myself

PERKINS You seem to me a funny sort of chap to be a night porter

WILL I'll explain about night porters Sit down, won't you There
are three types

PERKINS It's funny how many things go in threes I remember
I once——

WILL (*firmly*) Yes, three types of night porters First, the fellows,
usually young, who take it on because they're hoping it'll lead to a
day job and promotion to head porter Second, the fellows on the
other slope of the hill, who have to take night duty because they're
no longer wanted during the day, so it's either that or nothing, see?
Then—the third type, who *like* being night porters, just because they're
odd fish, misfits, eccentrics, philosophers

PERKINS And you're a number three?

WILL I'm a number three

PERKINS I believe you're right

WILL I know I'm right

PERKINS Three types I'll remember that

WILL You might find it useful But now—this yarn of yours,
about the big financial syndicate working late at night here, well—
bit thick, isn't it?

PERKINS I don't know Anything's possible these days Now I've
tried this place and the Grand and the Queen's——

WILL Well, there's still the Royal and the Bristol, and the Spa
Hydro, though I can't see any big financial chaps staying at the
Spa Hydro

PERKINS Why?

WILL It's a temperance hotel

PERKINS Well, I'll try the Royal and the Bristol

MOLLY *enters, Staff Door, wearing long outdoor coat over her*
uniform She does not come forward but looks at and listens to

PERKINS, *who is now going*

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

WILL No harm in doing that

PERKINS And if there's a story, I'll get it

WILL Got a nose for it, eh?

PERKINS (*confidentially*) I tell you—with me, it's a kind of—oh—sixth sense I can smell out a good story where most fellows wouldn't know there was anything happening I couldn't tell you how I do it

WILL A gift, eh?

PERKINS Absolutely You'll see Watch the *Gazette* I could have sworn I'd seen you somewhere before

WILL No

PERKINS Oh, well, good night (*Goes out street*)

MOLLY Good evening, Mr Lotless

WILL Good evening, Mrs Cudden

MOLLY What's the matter with that chap?

WILL (*dryly*) He's a newspaper man busy taking his sixth sense round Cheltingate

MOLLY (*rather alarmed*) Here—it's nothing to do with this—er—business of ours, is it?

WILL (*blandly*) D'you know, I think it might be

MOLLY (*alarmed*) Well, but—

WILL (*stopping her*) You just leave his sixth sense to me I can handle him all right He'll never get within a mile of our story

MOLLY (*gazing at him earnestly*) You know, William, I call you a proper mixture One minute you seem as simple as a baby, and next minute as artful as a box of monkeys

WILL Well, what's wrong with that?

MOLLY Oh!—nothing Makes it interesting (*Taking her coat off*) I gave myself a treat to-night—an I'll bet you don't know why

WILL I do You told me a week ago and I haven't forgotten Many happy returns!

MOLLY (*pleased*) Well now, I never thought you'd remember

WILL Never forget anything with a friend in it As a matter of fact, I've—er—got something—

MOLLY (*excitedly*) What! A present—for me!

WILL Too early yet Somebody might come in

MOLLY Yes, but you might tell me what it is

WILL Oh—no Spoil it Just wait until it's quieter

MOLLY Well, it couldn't be much quieter than it is now, but I suppose it is a bit too early

He has opened the door now Goes through and we see the lighting outside, which is first at full, go down to less than half, as if he had switched off several lights MOLLY can put her coat away, behind Staff Door, now She is back when he returns

WILL Where did you go? To the pictures?

MOLLY (*with enthusiasm*) Yes A lovely film With Robert Drake in it Don't you like Robert Drake?

WILL Never seen him

MOLLY Haven't you? Oh—he's a wonderful man Tall an' very good-looking, but that's not what gets you He's got a little smile—sort of tender—and—and—wistful—and his eyes crinkle up If he turned that smile on to me, I wouldn't know what to do And this girl in the film was so awful to him—until right at the end, of course—an' she was so nasty when he kept giving her this special little smile, I could have smacked her silly little face

WILL (*settling down*) You were jealous?

MOLLY (*indignantly*) I wasn't jealous To begin with, I haven't got a jealous nature And then, who's going to be jealous about somebody in a film? I may be a bit soft, but I'm not *that* soft But, you see, in this picture, he's a poor young man who has nothing left but an old motor-car and a caravan——

Breaks off because ALEC ROTHBURY now enters from street He is in ordinary clothes—not smartly dressed but rather shabby—and looks rather tired and depressed

ALEC I don't call him a poor young man if he had a car and a caravan

WILL He's poor for the films They've a very high standard of living on the films

ALEC Go on about your film, Molly Sorry I interrupted (*Lights a cigarette*)

MOLLY Well then, Robert Drake's this poor young man but really it turns out in the end he isn't poor

ALEC (*sardonically*) I'll bet he isn't

MOLLY But this girl he's in love with—he thinks, and you think too till you tumble to it, she's very rich—but really she isn't, she's just pretending So in the end it's all right, and they get married and sail away on his beautiful yacht Lovely!

ALEC (*shaking his head*). No Eh, William?

WILLIAM (*also shaking his head*) Certainly not

MOLLY Now what's wrong with it?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

ALEC To begin with, it doesn't sound to me in the least like real life

MOLLY Who said it was like real life? I don't pay a shilling to sit in the dark and look at real life I can see real life outside the picture theatre all for nothing I go inside to get away from real life, just for a nice change

WILL That's a woman for you They can cod themselves, but they *know* when they're coddling themselves We don't, and that's our trouble

ALEC It's not *my* trouble Mine is—I can see all too clearly

MOLLY Not you! I'll bet you can't see anything clearly, unless it's other people's measles or chicken-pox

Hotel telephone rings She answers it

Yes, of course coming now (*Puts down telephone*)

WILL Eighteen?

MOLLY Eighteen Shan't be long

Goes out Staff Door

ALEC (*coolly*) I believe you two are up to something

WILL Put that right out of your head, doctor We're not that sort at all

ALEC No, I didn't mean anything of that kind But you're up to *something* For the last fortnight or so, you've looked as thick as thieves, and there's something about you, William, a kind of cat-full-of-cream look that suggests to me you're up to something (*As WILL is about to speak, stopping him*) I'm not asking what it is

WILL (*dryly*) I wasn't going to tell you

ALEC But what I should like is a drink and a sandwich I've had a very long and dreary day to-day, with an extra two hours I didn't expect at the hospital to-night

WILL You're looking a bit done in, doctor And you can have the drink and sandwich now, if you like, but you'd do better if you waited a little longer

ALEC I don't see that

WILL I'll explain It's Molly's birthday to-day and—er—well, a fellow I know in London has sent a wonderful hamper for her—everything of the best—champagne, game pie——

ALEC (*surprised*) For Molly?

WILL (*solemnly*) For our Molly Cudden And why not? Can you tell me anybody here who better deserves the best for her birthday than that woman?

ALEC Yes, me Apart from me, nobody But where do *I* come in?

WILL It's a little party, and you're invited I know she won't mind

ALEC And I accept your invitation with many thanks I'm tired, but I'm not sleepy

WILL (*challengingly*) You're depressed }

ALEC Yes I'm fed up

WILL This place?

ALEC Partly Though I shan't be here much longer

WILL Is the sack coming?

ALEC It is

WILL Is that all?

ALEC No But it's plenty, isn't it?

WILL Yes, but it isn't all

ALEC It's all you'll hear

WILL (*quietly, innocently*) Let's see, what was the name of that girl?

ALEC (*promptly*) Veronica Frensham Here—what girl?

Telephone rings WILL goes to answer it

WILL (*at telephone, in sharp masterful style*) Who? Yes, speaking Yes, yes, I know Get in touch with Vandermore He's ringing me later on Yes, all those are being transferred Oh, won't I? Don't you believe it I'll squeeze him so hard I'll have him begging for mercy by this time to-morrow night All right Tell Vandermore (*Puts down telephone*)

ALEC (*sardonically*) Queer business this hotel seems to do over the telephone at night!

WILL I dare say

ALEC And who is Mr Vandermore?

WILL He's a clever gentleman in London who knows now that he isn't quite as clever as he thought he was a couple of weeks ago

ALEC William, you're not a downright crook, by any chance, are you?

WILL (*smiling*) In one sense I am, and then in another sense, I'm not Excuse me, it's time we got the party going (*Goes towards Staff Door*) You might give me a hand, doctor

Goes out

ALEC (*calling*) All right, coming!

Goes towards Staff Door, but when he arrives there WILL comes out carrying hamper and large cardboard box ALEC takes the box, which is on top They come forward

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

I hope all this is honestly come by

WILL In one sense it is, and then in another sense, it isn't

Puts down hamper near table and begins unpacking it Two or three bottles of champagne, game pie, pâte, etc , all very sumptuous

ALEC (*as it comes out*) My hat, somebody's spent some money on this lot

WILL Everything of the best Though I don't suppose this sort of tack does you any good, does it?

ALEC (*grinning*) In one sense it does, and then in another sense, it doesn't (*Helps to put things out*) Taken in very rare doses, it's bad for the body but good for the soul Taken in regular doses, it's bad for both body and soul

Enter MOLLY through main door She stops in surprise when she sees the table

MOLLY Good gracious me! Where's all this come from?

WILL From a friend of mine in London—as a little birthday tribute

MOLLY For me?

ALEC And for me You've invited me

MOLLY I'm glad to hear it With all that lot to shift

WILL I'll get some glasses

MOLLY No, let me

WILL (*going*) You stay there, and take it easy It's your treat
Goes

MOLLY (*handling the things*) Look! It's a sort of Christmas de luxe I never saw such a spread And all expensive stuff too

ALEC (*deliberately echoing WILL*) Everything of the best But who's treated you to all this?

MOLLY Don't ask me You heard what William said One of his friends in London

ALEC What friends?

MOLLY Probably one of these people he's been doing business with.

ALEC What business?

MOLLY Here, aren't you nosey?

ALEC Now, come on, Molly, I knew there was something on between you two What is it?

MOLLY I couldn't really tell you even if I wanted to And I promised William I wouldn't

ALEC Has he been making some money for you?

MOLLY (*dodging this*) Do I look as if anybody's been making money for me?

ALEC Yes, you do, with this stuff all round you

Begins taking paper off champagne bottle

MOLLY We ought to have taken this round to the back We'll look silly, won't we, if somebody comes in here

ALEC Nobody'll come in now You're all right Besides, William has to be on duty in here

MOLLY I hadn't thought of that What with its being my birthday, and then Robert Drake in that film, and then all this stuff I didn't expect, I'm a bit light-headed to-night

Enter WILL, Staff Door, with glasses, cutlery

(*Gaily*) The doctor doesn't deserve to be in on this, he's being so nosey about everything

WILL We can't have that Dr Rothbury, you may remember those fairy tales you read as a kid where you could enjoy everything you fancied so long as you didn't start asking questions? Well, this is one of them fairy tales

ALEC (*holding up glass*) And now a toast! Many happy returns and every good wish—to our Molly

WILL (*same*) To our Molly Cudden—the most obliging, best-tempered, sweetest-natured woman in the whole hotel business

They drink

MOLLY (*embarrassed*) Now, stop that, you two, or you'll be making me go all soft—an' then I'll start crying—an' a fat lot o' supper I'll enjoy Who'll have some of this? It looks very rich but it can't hurt us much, just for once

Passes them things to eat

They settle down to eat and drink, cosily

WILL This is living on twenty thousand a year for twenty minutes

MOLLY (*after drinking*) Sort of gets right up your nose, doesn't it, this champagne It's not as sweet as that my sister had after her wedding

ALEC (*refills glasses With mock gravity*) Good champagne isn't supposed to be sweet

MOLLY Why?

ALEC Hanged if I know!

WILL (*solemnly*) It's the custom in England to prefer dry champagne, and in England we live not by reason, not even by instinct, but by custom

ALEC And that's how the people are kept quiet Because, custom——

MOLLY Is this going to be politics?

ALEC Yes

MOLLY Well, stop it, then No politics to-night, thank you

ALEC Why not?

MOLLY (*good-humouredly but firmly*) Because this is supposed to be my party, and I don't like politics, and if you two get started on 'em, I'll soon be sitting here like a stuffed dummy

WILL (*passing food*) Have some more stuffing

MOLLY Thank you Now let's just be cosy, for once (*After pause*) Doctor, I wonder what's become of that very good-looking girl you were so gone on You're still gone on her, aren't you?

ALEC Not really

MOLLY Go on Written all over you I wonder what she's doing to-night

ALEC She'll be pretending to be amused and trying not to yawn, in some expensive and ridiculous place

MOLLY (*to WILL*) It's a funny thing about young men—an' I don't care who they are, doctors or anything else you like—but when they're feeling uneasy and a bit silly inside, they get all pompous

WILL True, true (*To ALEC*) She's right, y'know

ALEC Yes, yes, I'll admit it

WILL (*to MOLLY*) But don't be too hard on young men

MOLLY Me! Why, I love 'em nearly all Bless 'em

WILL You don't know what it's like being a clever young fellow, like our friend here But I do, because I was one once myself And I say that except for those occasional times when you fancy you've got the world in your pocket, to be a clever young man is just hell

ALEC True, true (*To MOLLY*) He's right, y'know

MOLLY And I don't believe it Just try being a woman for half a day, an' then you'd know something That's why we like being with men We aren't reminded of all our miseries I'm going to drink to women—poor things!

ALEC (*who has been opening another bottle*) Not yet Here you are (*Fills glasses*)

WILL (*raising glass*) To women—excluding nagging wives, interfering spinsters, bullying rich old dowagers, cheating adventuresses, pert little minxes, and——

ALEC (*poutedly*) All girls, no matter how devilishly attractive, who put money first—and——

MOLLY And all female hotel guests who spill powder all over their rooms and leave their stockings and knuckers to soak in the washhand basins——

They all drink off (MOLLY *Hic!*)

Here, if I don't eat more an' drink less, I'll be tiddly (*Suddenly notices cardboard box*) What's in that box?

WILL (*noticing it*) I'd clean forgotten that (*Goes to it, and begins opening it*) It's for you

MOLLY (*excitedly*) For me!

WILL Birthday present

ALEC (*dryly*) Friend in London?

WILL Friend in London Now, just hold your breath—oh!—and close your eyes

As she stands with closed eyes, he goes over and puts a magnificent fur coat into her outstretched arms She feels the thick soft fur, then opens her eyes wide in astonishment, stares at it as she holds it out to see it better

MOLLY (*gasping*) Christmas! Oooo—look!

ALEC We are looking We're overwhelmed

WILL (*complacently*) You've got something worth having there, Molly

MOLLY (*all excitement now*) But—I mean—this can't be for me Look at it!

WILL Certainly it's for you Try it on

MOLLY But—I've never even dreamt of ever having a coat like this It's a real one, y'know—I mean to say—not one of these imitations you see about—absolutely real

WILL You can bet your life it is

MOLLY Yes, but—I mean—*me* in this Why—I'd never——

ALEC Go on Put it on

She does, almost like a child Then is delighted with herself, being luxurious in it, rubbing her cheek against the collar, etc

MOLLY (*at end of this*) How do I look in it? Silly, I expect, eh?

WILL Silly nothing! You look grand, doesn't she?

ALEC Straight from Bond Street

MOLLY You're just making game of me——

WILL We're not You couldn't look better

ALEC We can hardly believe you know us now

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

MOLLY (*doing creditable imitation of fashionable woman, coming to them*) Oh—but—of course! Dr Rothbury, I believe, isn't it? I think we met the other morning in the Pump Room, didn't we? And Mr Lotless too! How d'you do? Such a delightful place you have heah, isn't it?

WILL (*entering into this*) Oh—frightfully jolly—Lady Bilgewater

MOLLY (*as before*) May I join you?

WILL Delighted, dear lady, absolutely delighted!

MOLLY (*tapping desk and imitating LADY LEADMILL*) Are there any letters for me?

WILL (*imitating MONDOVI*) Miss-a Weeks, make-a quite sure there are no letters for Lady Bilgewater—

ALEC Not to-night, Lady Bilgewater

MOLLY (*as LADY LEADMILL*) The posts here are most peculiar, most peculiar

They all laugh uproariously

MOLLY (*very much herself again*) Well, I'm not taking it off, though it'll be just like me to go an' mess it up now (*She stops and looks earnestly at WILL, and speaks with impressive seriousness*) Now, tell me, honestly, is it all right me taking this coat?

WILL (*gravely*) If it hadn't been all right, do you think I'd have let you have it?

MOLLY But—you didn't buy it, did you?

WILL Me! All the money I have in the world couldn't buy the collar, let alone the coat

MOLLY I don't see that Didn't I say, the other night, that you ought to take—

WILL (*hastily cutting in*) Never mind what you said Careful now!

MOLLY (*realising ALEC's presence*) Oh—yes Sorry! Though I don't see why—

WILL (*cutting in again*) Well, I do (*To ALEC*) Excuse me, won't you?

ALEC Yes, but you might as well tell me

WILL Not just now What we want is another toast

ALEC (*showing slight signs of tightness*) I'll give you one To blazes with old Plumweather!

MOLLY No, that's not very nice Besides, I'm sure Dr Plumweather's done nobody any harm

ALEC There you're wrong He may look a harmless old pussycat, but really he's a pest and a menace Instead of being a man of

science, which he pretends to be, he's something between an old charlatan and a rich old woman's butler. He doesn't speak or even think the truth. He doesn't care about anything but fat fees and fat dinners. He's an example of what's wrong with this pussy-footed, rich old man's country. And if you won't drink him to blazes, I will (*Raises his glass*) To blazes with old Plumweather, and may he soon find himself trying to remove a perforating appendix at three in the morning in a slum tenement (*Drinks*)

MOLLY (*also showing slight signs*) If I didn't think you were very unhappy about that Miss Frensham, I wouldn't allow you to talk like that, just when we're trying to be cheerful and cosy.

ALEC I have a terrible contempt for your Miss Frensham——

MOLLY Not you!

ALEC I repeat, a terrible contempt. Charming? No doubt. Beautiful? Perhaps. But what is she really? I'll tell you. Something out of a glass case, to be bought with money. Now there's something to drink to—the end of the reign of money. Eh, William?

WILL (*fishes in hamper*) I've got something for that toast. *Brings it out, and pulls cork out as he speaks*) Some old liqueur brandy. Just what we need now.

MOLLY Not for me, thank you. And you two want to be careful.

ALEC Certainly not. We've been careful too long. That's our trouble.

MOLLY (*as if suddenly remembering*) Here—William Lotless—didn't you tell me—and more than once—that you didn't drink any more?

WILL I did. But to-night I do drink. And I give you our young medical friend's toast—to the end of the reign of money——

MOLLY I like that from you, when you're always *talking* and *thinking* about money!

WILL (*to ALEC*) Isn't that like a woman! If you saved one from drowning, she'd remind you that you promised to keep your clothes dry. To the end of the reign of money.

ALEC To the end of the reign of money.

MOLLY To the reign of the end of money.

WILL Now do you want me to explain about money?

MOLLY } No

ALEC } (*promptly*) Yes

WILL (*as if beginning lecture*) Money! Money! It's a servant that's become a master.

ALEC True, but not very original.

WILL Money—was intended to be simply a sign, a token, a convenience—something like a—well, a railway ticket That's all But what's happened to it? Got all out of hand Become a source of power The way we allow people to handle money as power, it's just as if we let 'em handle battleships and bombing squadrons for their own private benefit

ALEC You're right there, William (*To MOLLY*) He's right there

MOLLY Oh—he's often right (*To WILL*) Is that all?

WILL (*who has found a large cigar in the hamper and is now ready to light it*) All? Of course it isn't all Now the first thing you have to do is to take most of the power away from money In fact, private money should be just pocket money That's the only kind of money I believe in—pocket money Everybody should have pocket money and nobody should have any other kind

MOLLY What's the difference?

WILL Pocket money is just short-range, personal money, to be spent on—whatever you fancy You can't use it to make me do something for you in a year's time, as if you had a pistol at my head You can't send it out to increase itself, while you sit back and watch it grow—

MOLLY But you said the other night that's just what we were doing—I mean, in this funny business with all these shares—and now you say—

WILL But I'm telling you now how things ought to be, not how they are We're only doing what everybody tries to do We're not doing anything wrong

MOLLY It must be wrong if you think it isn't right (*As he tries to cut in*) No, no, no—now let me get a word in

ALEC Quite right It's your birthday party—not his

MOLLY Now I say it's all very well, all this clever talk about how things ought to be, but if we think something's wrong, then we oughtn't to do it ourselves Somebody's got to make a start, haven't they?

WILL No It's a question of a system, not just of people themselves

MOLLY Everything depends really just on how people treat each other If people aren't willing, and kind, and hopeful, then it's all up But if they are, then it's all right

WILL Now, you can't begin to—

MOLLY (*cutting in ruthlessly*) I can begin (*Hic*) I've begun I think that where the trouble starts is that some people are dead against happiness They can't have it themselves, so they're going to spoil it for other people They don't like life at all, these folks—they'd

like to be safe an' dead, only they don't know it, or perhaps they never wanted to be born—an' so whenever they see a bit of life springing up, they want to tread on it. They go rolling round like—like tanks—an' God help any little piece of happiness that's in the way. Now I don't say there's a lot of these people——

ALEC I do. Millions and millions of 'em

WILL I'm not sure we aren't producing more and more of 'em

MOLLY Now why should we be?

WILL Because of the way most people have to live. Now take——

ALEC (*boisterously cutting in*) Take another drink. Must have a toast. (*As glasses are being filled*) My turn too.

MOLLY Well, make it something good.

ALEC (*solemnly*) What about the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company, coupled with the London School of Tropical Hygiene and Major Butterworth, secretary of the North Cheltingate Golf Club?

MOLLY (*seriously*) That sounds silly to me. What about Absent Friends?

WILL I haven't any.

MOLLY What? Not one?

WILL Not one.

MOLLY Well, you poor thing! (*To ALEC*) What about you? You must have plenty.

ALEC (*seriously*) Four perhaps. No—three. Well, be on the safe side, and say two.

MOLLY Good gracious me, I've dozens an' dozens.

WILL (*cutting in solemnly, raising glass*) Molly's Absent Friends.

ALEC (*same*) Molly's Absent Friends.

MOLLY (*same*) Oh—right, then. Absent Friends—bless 'em. (*Drinks*)

MOLLY (*hiccup*)

ALEC (*laugh*)

LADY LEADMILL Well!

There is a sound at Card Room Door, which now opens. MONDOVI is holding it open, and LADY LEADMILL, LADY GARNETT, MRS TAGG come out, followed by DR PLUMWEATHER, SIR RUFUS, TAGG, and finally MONDOVI himself. Time should be given for all these to emerge and fan themselves out and forward a little. They have been chattering as they come out, but surprise silences them, as it has also silenced the opposite group of three. The

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silence is finally broken by a roar of laughter from ALEC, at whom the guests stare angrily

TAGG (*annoyed*) Can't see anything funny about it

MONDOVI (*coming forward, furiously to MOLLY and WILL*) Funny! Eet is dis-a-graceful What are you two doing-a here—eating-a—dreenking-a——?

ALEC Oh—that's my fault If it hadn't been for me——

MOLLY (*cutting in, firmly*) It's nothing to do with Dr Rothbury You see, it happens to be my birthday to-day—and——

WILL (*cutting in*) I'm responsible for this bit of gaiety out here, not her It was my idea

LADY LEADMILL (*hoping to crush him*) Indeed!

WILL (*who is still smoking his cigar*) Yes, indeed

LADY GARNETT (*to MOLLY*) May we ask whose coat you're wearing?

MOLLY (*indignantly*) It's my own It came as a present

LADY GARNETT Really!

MOLLY (*same tone as WILL above*) Yes, really

TAGG Cheeky talk now!

MRS TAGG Yes, but it may be her own coat——

TAGG (*rudely*) Just take a look at it, and then ask yourself how chambermaids get coats like that

ALEC Don't be such a lout

TAGG What?

WILL (*coolly*) He said "Don't be such a lout"

MONDOVI (*spluttering with rage*) Fineesh! Absolute fineesh! To-morrow—you go——

DR PLUMWEATHER (*pompously*) Just a moment, Mondovi Dr Rothbury?

ALEC (*calmly*) Yes, Dr Plumweather?

DR PLUMWEATHER I've been looking for a good opportunity to say something to you, and you've provided me with one

ALEC (*to MOLLY and WILL*) What did I tell you? It's here—the sack

DR PLUMWEATHER (*annoyed*) The sack! Yes, exactly And the sooner we part company, the better

ALEC I quite agree

DR PLUMWEATHER And let me tell you, that until you acquire a few decent manners and a sense of proportion you won't get very far

ALEC (*warming to it*) And let *me* tell *you*, that until you acquire more skill and honesty, which isn't likely now, you'll stay as you are

DR PLUMWEATHER (*angrily*) You confounded young ass!

ALEC You pompous old donkey!

MOLLY Hiccup!

LADY LEADMILL (*beginning in awful tones*) Young man——

ALEC No, thank you I haven't to listen to you any more

MONDOVI (*who has been dancing with impatience*) Please-a, please-a, ladees an' gentlemen, let-a me speak-a for a moment, because I am vary ashamed Nevair, nevair does it happen with me before You two—(*pointing to MOLLY and WILL*)—fineesh with this hotel—you go in the morning—out—fineesh——

SIR RUFUS Don't blame you Probably been helping themselves to your stuff too, eh? Champagne!

WILL (*coolly*) Bollinger '28, too How do you like that?

LADY LEADMILL Well, I don't propose to stay down here all night——

She begins moving forward MOLLY hastily puts herself in front of Main Door, facing them all

MOLLY (*with growing agitation*) Just wait a minute Nobody's going yet

MONDOVI (*spluttering*) You are drunk! You are mad Come away——

MOLLY (*stopping him with her voice*) You be quiet William there—and I—have worked very hard at this hotel We've always tried to be obliging and make everybody comfortable Even if we have made a bit of a slip to-night, we haven't done anybody any harm You wouldn't see us sacked, turned out, like this, would you?

MRS TAGG (*timidly*) Well, I must say, speaking for myself, I don't see there's much harm——

TAGG (*in fierce whisper*) Now you shut up!

MONDOVI (*wagging threatening finger*) I tella—you—fineesh—fineesh—thees hotel—all hotels——

MOLLY You hear him? Anybody got anything to say?

MONDOVI Yes—feeneesh—out——

There is a moment's silence while MOLLY stares at them all

MOLLY (*urgently*) When I think of all that I've done—an' with never a word of complaint—an' not even asking for any thanks—why—damn your eyes, the lot of you! You'll turn us out, will you? Well, we'll see William Lotless, you keep telling me I'm really a

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rich woman Does it mean anything or have you just been having a game with me? Am I rich?

WILL (*coolly*) Certainly you are

MOLLY Am I rich enough to buy this hotel?

SIR RUFUS Oh—really—~~this~~ is too much!

WILL (*to* SIR RUFUS) Don't worry You've heard nothing yet

MOLLY (*impatiently*) Never mind him Answer me Can I buy this hotel?

WILL You don't need to buy it Say the word, and it's yours

MONDOVI (*almost moaning*) Oh—what ees thees? All dronk-mad!

WILL (*masterfully*) You be quiet or you'll talk yourself clean out of the hotel business (*To* MOLLY) You don't need to buy this hotel, because three days ago you—acquired a controlling interest in Spa Hotels and Catering Limited, which owns this and six other hotels

SIR RUFUS (*as the others stare silently*) You don't expect us to believe that, do you?

WILL You can please yourself

TAGG Why, there's half a million of good property in Spa Hotels Limited

WILL (*taking papers from pocket*) Chicken-feed! Now, all of you, I know you like money, so just take a good look at Mrs Cudden there, because if she could realise on all her holdings to-morrow she'd be worth—(*glancing at his figures*)—well—at a conservative estimate—say, one million four hundred and fifty thousand pounds

MONDOVI (*dropping into chair*) One milli—oh!—lachrimae Christi!—

LADY LEADMILL This is a most extraordinary business—

MOLLY (*sharply*) Yes, but the only part of it that concerns all you is this I'm closing this hotel as soon as I can—to-morrow, if it's possible We're not going, but you are, the whole lot of you And as you may have a good deal of packing to do soon, don't stay up too late Good night

DR PLUMWEATHER (*looking at her with interest*) Well—of course—if this is true—

LADY GARNETT (*same look and tone*) It makes rather a difference—

MOLLY (*fiercely*) Not to me it doesn't Good night

SIR RUFUS (*conciliatory*) But—really now—

MOLLY (*very fiercely*) I said good night

Her moral superiority is so evident that they go out meekly, all

but MONDOVI, who is standing now but still dazed As the last of the guests are going, WILL goes over to MONDOVI and taps him on the shoulder

WILL You go out that way (*Points to Staff Door*)

MONDOVI Meester Lotless, I deed not-a know——

WILL (*firmly*) Pop off That way }

MONDOVI goes

ALEC (*to WILL*) Look here, is it true?

WILL Every word I've been playing the market with some shares she had left

MOLLY now sits down left of table and bursts into tears

Now why? Why?

ALEC Just reaction Nerves

MOLLY (*indignantly, through her tears*) It isn't nerves I hate them all And now I hate myself

ALEC (*soothingly*) Now, now, now!

WILL has now gone to telephone PERKINS enters briskly

MOLLY (*explosively*) I'm ashamed of myself (*Cries again*)

PERKINS Hello! Perkins of the Gazette

WILL (*now dialling at telephone*) Oh—my God!

PERKINS (*advancing*) What's all this? What's all this?

ALEC This is one of our chambermaids She's just heard she's worth one million, four hundred and fifty thousand pounds, has a controlling interest in Spa Hotels Limited, has just closed this hotel, is turning everybody out to-morrow, and is now enjoying a good cry

PERKINS (*cynically*) Thanks very much (*Indicates his leg*) And now pull that one

ALEC (*to WILL jocularly*) He thinks I'm pulling his leg

PERKINS (*with tremendous irony*) Oh no! I'm only a reporter—I believe everything (*Chiefly to WILL*) Well, I tried the Royal and the Bristol Nothing doing Then it suddenly came over me—ten minutes ago—that there's nothing in it

WILL (*still at telephone*) Sixth sense?

PERKINS Sixth sense, old man I said to myself, "You're wasting your time here, old man," I said "There never was a story in Cheltingate, and there never will be Get back to Manchester" So I'm catching the 12 45 Bye-bye, everybody (*Hurries out*) Bye-bye, everybody—one million four hundred—ha, ha!

WILL Just one of the bloodhounds of the Press (*Into phone*) Yes, I want Mr Vandermore Oh, yes, he will

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MOLLY What are you going to do now?

WILL I'm going to make some more money for you

MOLLY (*distressed*) Oh—stop it I don't want any more

WILL (*telephoning*) Vandermore? All right Lotless
here Now listen to me Don't get cold feet, Vandermore
I thought you were a good gambler or I wouldn't have taken you
in with us

MOLLY (*half crying*) You're different already Not half so nice
I don't want any more

He hushes her fiercely, and then concentrates, snapping out
"All right " "What of it?" etc , *as she dabs at her eyes and*
realises it is hopeless trying to stop him, and the curtain comes
quickly down

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

The Scene is the same as before, a week later Afternoon, with strong sunlight from street and above, as if through skylight The scene looks different now Clearly it is not being used as an hotel any longer The tables and chairs are no longer neatly arranged The reception desk is not in use

At a table just in front of desk is MISS WEEKS, who now looks like a busy typist in a broker's office There is a suggestion of barricade about the door and windows Actually the door has its blind drawn, but there is a peephole through the blind that GEORGE, the waiter, but no longer dressed like one, uses to see who is wanting to come in, for the door is carefully locked Just after rise, the telephone, now on MISS WEEKS's table, rings hard She answers it GEORGE is standing near door

MISS WEEKS (at telephone) I'm very sorry, madam, we can't
No, but at present the hotel is closed

GEORGE (sardonically) Say we can sell 'er some nice shares

MISS WEEKS (telephone) No, I don't know when it'll be open
again And good day to you (She dials and waits)

ELSIE enters through Staff Door carrying small tea-tray

GEORGE For me? Thank you, dear

ELSIE (contemptuously passing him) For you! T-t-t-t This is for
Mr Lotless (Halting a moment, with deceptive kindness) Would you
like some tea?

GEORGE Yes

ELSIE (crushingly) Then go and make some

ELSIE goes triumphantly into Card Room

GEORGE (to MISS WEEKS) You see!

MISS WEEKS See what?

GEORGE That's what you get for being affable Been my mistake
all along Too friendly and easy-goin' If I'd been more stand-
offish, do you know where I'd be now?

MISS WEEKS (wearily) Yes, with a nice little business of your own
in Preston Pans (Goes on with her work, ignoring his glare)

*After a moment, we hear WILL's voice booming angrily from Card
Room, then ELSIE, looking rather scared, returns from there.*

ELSIE (confidentially) Isn't he in a temper?

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GEORGE (*ironically*) I wouldn't be surprised

ELSIE Not anything like so nice as he used to be Is he, Miss Weeks?

MISS WEEKS He's working too hard And he doesn't get enough sleep Life he's leading is enough to put anybody on edge

ELSIE Well, I must say——

ELSIE breaks off because WILL now comes hurriedly out of Card Room He is in his shirt sleeves, smoking a cigar, and somehow looks like a busy financier and not like a night porter at all His manner is brusque and domineering He throws some documents on MISS WEEKS's desk

WILL (*curtly*) Make two copies of them And repeat that cable to the Manhattan Trust Have we had a wire yet from Fox giving us the Investment Corporation quotations?

MISS WEEKS (*the Secretary now*) No, Mr Lotless

WILL How the devil can a fellow be expected to do business under these conditions? What we want here is a tape machine Get a tape machine Tell 'em I want it installed at once Never mind what it costs Must have one Oh—you—Elsie—go up and tell Mrs Cudden I want her to sign some transfers

As ELSIE hesitates and looks uneasy

Well? Go on

He sees three of them exchanging uneasy glances

Well?

MISS WEEKS (*uneasily*) Mrs Cudden isn't here

WILL (*astounded*) Isn't here? Where is she?

MISS WEEKS She—went away—last night

WILL (*furious*) Great jumping Moses! And nobody told me (*To ELSIE*) Don't stand gaping there Pop off

ELSIE hurries off through Staff Door

WILL (*he takes hold of himself*) Did she say where she was going?

MISS WEEKS (*hesitating*) No, she didn't—not exactly.

WILL What d'you mean—not exactly?

MISS WEEKS (*hesitating*) Well—I have an idea—she was going to London——

WILL Worse and worse! Just where I didn't want her to go Did she say what she was going to do? Bit o' shopping perhaps, eh?

MISS WEEKS She didn't say

GEORGE (*slowly*) I've an idea——

WILL (*brutally*) I don't believe you, but let's have it

GEORGE Sorry I spoke Sorry I spoke (*Looks as if he'll never speak again*)

WILL Now listen, you two, this is serious There's millions at stake Everything's in Molly Cudden's name, and if some people I know in London got hold of her, that 'ud be the end of me—and of you too Look at it Here's a woman worth millions—and as simple as a sausage—wandering about London—Oh Christmas! It's enough to give you heart disease

GEORGE I've an idea she went to see that Miss Frensham—you remember, that good-lookin' young piece—who was staying here a few weeks since I saw Mrs Cudden lookin' at the register before she went and takin' an address down—and I had a look where she'd been lookin', after she'd gone—and it seemed to me she'd been taking down that Miss Frensham's address

WILL (*to MISS WEEKS*) Send a wire to Mrs Cudden care o' this Miss Frensham "Return immediately very urgent and you are badly needed here Will Lotless" That ought to bring her back And we've got to get her back before some o' those smooth City and West End boys get their forks into her, or we'll all be carved up Get that wire off at once (*He moves towards Card Room, then wheels on them, accusingly*) Why didn't you tell me she'd gone away?

As they don't reply

I see She specially asked you not to tell me, eh?

GEORGE Yes, she did

WILL (*bitterly*) The biggest deal I was ever in—and it's like trying to do it from an infants' school

There is a sharp knocking at the front door

Who's that? Don't let any newspaper men in Or anybody I don't know

GEORGE (*looking through peephole*) It's Mondovi

WILL All right Let him in

GEORGE *lets him in* MISS WEEKS *is busy sending the wire quietly over the telephone* MONDOVI *is in ordinary clothes and looking worried*

MONDOVI Ah—Meestair Lotta-less—good afternoon

WILL (*curtly*) Afternoon, Mondovi I told you to go up to London and see the general manager of the company for another job

MONDOVI Yais——

WILL *nods and goes into Card Room*

Thank you so much

MISS WEEKS Where are you staying, Mr Mondovi?

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MONDOVI (*confidentially*) Ovaiv at the Grand with my frien' Pellini An' I tella you, Mees Weeks, thatta Grand Hotel ees no good Tairrible!

GEORGE It can't be much worse than this used to be

MONDOVI Oh—yais Mycha worse Tairrible! Notta comfortable—an' a varry bada crew in the kitchen Las night Pellini says "I give-a you *supreme de chicken Grand Hotel*—speciality of my chef" Alla right, I taste eet Tairrible! At once I know Notta poulet—notta chicken—at all Eet was—— (*He makes scampering gestures with his fingers*)

MISS WEEKS (*horrified*) Rats

MONDOVI Oh—no—notta rats—but—er—you know—*lapin bunnee*—yais—bunnee rabbits (*With tremendous scorn*) *Supreme de chicken Grand Hotel*—specialaite—weeth bunnee rabbits

GEORGE (*gloomily*) One seaside place I worked in, the chicken used to be guinea-pig There were a lot of boys' schools in that town

MONDOVI So! What do you do 'ere now?

MISS WEEKS We're a sort of mixture of millionaires and charwomen

MONDOVI The hotel—it is steel closed, eh?

GEORGE That's right And if it's a success we'll close down the rest of the company's hotels

MISS WEEKS Is there anything we can do for you, Mr Mondovi?

MONDOVI Oh—no I forgot my diplome—diploma, eh? It ees in my office And I am afraid someone might take eet

GEORGE What for?

MONDOVI (*pointedly*) Because wit' theese diploma a man can be something better than a waiter—eh, Miss Weeks? Excusa me, pliss

MONDOVI *goes through Staff Door*

GEORGE (*doing his parody*) Nice-a people—varry reech!

There is a pause, during which GEORGE yawns and MISS WEEKS does some typing Then the door slowly opens, and MOLLY CUDDEN, carrying a small case and dressed in her fur coat, enters cautiously, after looking round

MOLLY (*almost whispering*) Well, I haven't been away long have I? Did he find out I'd gone?

GEORGE Only a few minutes since

MOLLY Shows what a lot of interest he takes in me, doesn't it?

MISS WEEKS But he was furious

MOLLY (*shrewdly*) Why? Because he missed me?

GEORGE No, because he thought one of the other crooks would get hold of you

MOLLY For once I believe you're right, George (*As she takes off her coat and puts bag down, etc*) Well, I enjoyed that little trip, though I nearly roasted myself in that fur coat It looks drearier than ever—shut up in here like this—not a bit of life or anything—

MISS WEEKS (*with irony*) Just making millions

MOLLY I've enjoyed myself more making beds Now, you two, pop off and get some tea

MISS WEEKS But Mr Lotless—

MOLLY (*cutting in, firmly*) Never mind him Besides, I've got a tricky bit of business on, and you'll be better off if you're not mixed up in it

GEORGE (*moving off*) Suits me

MISS WEEKS (*rising, rather reluctantly*) Well, if you'll take the responsibility

MOLLY Don't worry about that Off you pop

GEORGE (*turning just before exit, Staff Door*) By the way, our old pal's here

MOLLY Who d'you mean?

GEORGE Vairry reech, vairry nice-a people.

GEORGE and MISS WEEKS go out

MOLLY, who is clearly bursting with intrigue, peeps anxiously through the peep-hole, then goes towards Card Room quietly, then returns for another peep MONDOVI now returns, triumphantly carrying a large framed diploma

MONDOVI Ah—Meesis Cudden—you are vairry well?

MOLLY Only just fair. Too much sitting about What have you got there?

MONDOVI (*showing it proudly*) My diploma You like eet?

MOLLY (*seriously*) I think it's wonderful Fancy it saying all that about you!

MONDOVI Thank you very much Good afternoon, Mrs Cudden

MOLLY (*after short pause*) Mr Mondovi, what's it like running an hotel?

MONDOVI Meesis Cudden—I tella you Running an hotel would be pairfect—eef eet was not for two things—just two things One—the owners The othair—the guests

MOLLY So—if you owned it yourself and had different kinds of guests from the usual—eh?

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MONDOVI I theenk—it would be delightful An' I theenk I know where they have such hotels——

MOLLY (*eagerly*) Where?

MONDOVI (*pointing upward*) In heaven Gooda afternoon, Meesis Cudden

MONDOVI *goes*

MOLLY Good afternoon, Mr Mondovi

*WILL enters from Card Room They look at each other a moment
He is furious She is defiant*

WILL So you had to sneak out and go to London?

MOLLY Well, why shouldn't I?

WILL (*angrily*) Because you might easily have ditched everything Yes, ruined us both just for a damned silly woman's whim Let me remind you of something A month ago you were a chambermaid here and never looked like being anything else, and now you're the richest woman in England And who did it? You didn't do it You don't know yet what it's all about I did it

MOLLY Nobody said you didn't

WILL (*furious*) And all I ask, while I'm making millions for you, is that you stay here and keep quiet for a week or two And you can't even do that! You go an' risk everything rather than do what I ask you to do! Another break like this and you might find yourself making beds again

MOLLY (*coolly*) Well, that wouldn't kill me Might do me a bit of good

WILL I'm trying to make you into something——

MOLLY (*cutting in*) Well, don't try so hard then And another thing, Will Lotless Stop making yourself into something I don't like When you were nothing but the Night Porter here, you were a nice chap

WILL And what's the matter with me now?

MOLLY Everything You go shouting and stamping and swearing You haven't got a smile for anybody You look so worried and cross——

WILL (*shouting*) And you'd look worried and cross if you'd got the biggest financial deal of a lifetime in the balance (*Makes gesture, and then is calmer but still sharp*) Why did you go to London?

MOLLY For a nice change

WILL Did you see that Frensham girl?

MOLLY Yes I knew she wasn't rich really I told you at the time She told me she was a secretary And this morning she introduced

me to her employer And he insisted on coming back here with us

WILL (*alarmed*) What! But who——

VERONICA FRINSHAM and LORD FLEETFIELD *enter through Main Door* LORD FLEETFIELD *is elderly, tall, imposing, superbly dressed*

VERONICA (*to WILL*) Hello, Mr Lotless!

MOLLY (*rather nervously*) Will, this is Lord Fleetfield

LORD FLEETFIELD (*coolly, as WILL glares*) No introduction necessary, Mrs Cudden Just as I thought This is Mr William Blofield

WILL (*very fiercely, to MOLLY*) You dirty rat!

MOLLY (*furious*) Oh—you——

She marches across and slaps his face—hard, then overcome by what she has done, she turns aside and collapses into chair

VERONICA (*indignantly to WILL*) And serves you right What has she done?

WILL (*bitterly*) Finished me—and herself too

MOLLY (*rising, bewildered*) I don't know what you're talking about

LORD FLEETFIELD (*smoothly*) Perhaps I'd better explain

WILL (*bitterly*) That's right Enjoy yourself

LORD FLEETFIELD This is Mr William Blofield I thought I recognised his touch in these recent operations on the market Mr Blofield was at one time a very well-known and successful speculator Then he was found guilty of forging securities and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment

MOLLY (*aghast*) William!

WILL You had to bring him here, hadn't you? Well, it's true Blofield—ex-convict—jailbird—that's me

MOLLY (*almost overcome, moving nearer*) William, I always knew there was *something* Why didn't you tell me?

WILL (*waving her away, bitterly*) I'll tell you something now Don't think Lord Fleetfield has come here and told you who I am just for the good of your health I know *him* And the only real difference between him and me is that I was found out—and—well, he's Lord Fleetfield

LORD FLEETFIELD (*coolly*) Oh no, there are other differences

WILL Yes, and I'll tell you what they are The game we played was just the same game, but of course he played it with more style Nothing vulgar, nothing common, about him In with the Right People Decent chap, sound fella, sahib But playing just the same game, and ten times more dangerous

LORD FLEETFIELD My dear Blofield, you overlook the all-im-

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portant difference in method And then perhaps people saw that when I achieved some power I made use of it with tact, courtesy, and perhaps even with some charm Whereas you bragged and blustered and rode rough-shod So society took advantage of the first mistake you made to hurry you out of sight and hearing Let us, it says, at least have pleasant masters Are you taking this down, Miss Frensham?

VERONICA (*who is*) Yes, Lord Fleetfield

LORD FLEETFIELD Quite right It may come in for something

WILL (*roughly*) All right, then take it down I say Lord Fleetfield—

MOLLY (*urgently, cutting in*) No, stop it, William Let me say something now (*To LORD FLEETFIELD*) I didn't know he'd been in prison But—but I don't see that it matters now He did something that was wrong He's paid for it That's done with Can't we all forget about it?

LORD FLEETFIELD No, Mrs Cudden, we can't We have here a very serious matter These bold piratical raids on the stock market are extremely disturbing Two large combines in important national industries have already been badly shaken Investors may lose confidence Therefore it's our duty to stop such raids

WILL (*bitterly*) In other—and plainer—words—I've been spoiling his racket, and he's not going to stand for it

LORD FLEETFIELD (*impressively*) Certainly I'm not going to stand for it And if we must have plain words, here they are I can send Mr Blofield here back to prison, and unless I can come to a friendly agreement with him during the next hour, I shall see that he goes back to prison

WILL (*to MOLLY*) And now do you see what you've done?

MOLLY Is it true—what he says?

WILL Yes

MOLLY And is that why you had to keep it all so secret?

WILL Yes.

MOLLY (*distressed*) You see, William, I didn't know I didn't know I see why you called me that And I hit you I'm sorry, William I didn't know

WILL (*bitterly*) You know now

MOLLY (*reproachfully*) A month ago you wouldn't have talked like that (*Then bursting out*) Oh—I think it's horrible—all of it I wish I'd never had anything to do with it (*To WILL*) It's spoilt you once—sending you to prison—and now it's beginning to spoil

you again (*To LORD FLEETFIELD*) And I thought you were such a nice man—and now when I bring you here, you talk about sending William to prison again It's all horrible and *wrong*

VERONICA (*turning to her, sympathetically*) Molly—

MOLLY No, dear—it's all gone wrong And I ought to try and think—and I can't—I'm so upset

She goes out of the group and sits down

LORD FLEETFIELD and WILL look at her a moment, then at each other

WILL Well?

Comes down

LORD FLEETFIELD If you and I could talk this over quietly—away from these emotional disturbances—we might come to some amicable settlement—eh?

WILL (*curtly*) What kind of settlement will that be?

LORD FLEETFIELD That you're out, Blofield Out of these deals—but also—still out of prison And that's my final word

WILL All right You win I've a room here I use as an office Let's go in there

He leads the way

LORD FLEETFIELD *nods to VERONICA, so she follows him and all three go into Card Room*

MOLLY *sits miserably, trying to think*

After a moment or two, ALEC enters, as if from hospital He stops when he sees MOLLY

ALEC Here, what's the matter, Molly?

MOLLY (*slowly coming out of her misery*) Everything All gone wrong I brought Lord Fleetfield here—

ALEC What—the big financial man?

MOLLY Yes I thought he could help William But now it seems he's threatening to send him to prison And that's not what I meant at all

ALEC Look here, Molly I've thought for some time you didn't realise what all this money-making does mean

MOLLY Are you going to start now?

ALEC Yes

MOLLY Go on then What does it mean?

ALEC Well, it isn't just entering figures into a book and finding you've got lots and lots of money to spend It's grabbing power, Molly.

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

You're playing about with people's lives—the lives of thousands and thousands of people you've never even seen

MOLLY (*shocked*) Oh—but I never meant——

ALEC I don't care what you meant—that's what it is People's savings disappear They have to give up their houses, sell their furniture Kids have to leave school People can't take the holidays they planned Fellows are sacked—middle-aged men turned out of jobs

MOLLY (*indignantly*) Stop it! I won't hear another word D'you think if I imagined it was like that—all real—messing about with people's lives—I'd have anything to do with it? Why, I'd have burnt them shares first Why—it's *disgraceful*

ALEC (*grinning*) Here, steady You could have given them to me—to help me to start that clinic

MOLLY That's what you want, isn't it, a clinic?

ALEC That's all I want

MOLLY Oh, no, it isn't

ALEC What do you mean?

MOLLY She's in there

ALEC Who? Not Veronica Frensham?

MOLLY (*as she begins to move towards Card Room*) Yes She's this Lord Fleetfield's secretary

ALEC A secretary?

MOLLY I told you she wasn't rich I'll bring her out

She marches into the Card Room, and then returns at once with
VERONICA

Now then, settle it between you And if anybody wants me, I'll be up in my room, trying to stop looking a sight. (*She is now collecting her coat, etc*) And don't be silly, you two Get on with it Let's have something sensible out of all this palaver

She goes out

VERONICA (*smiling*) Well?

ALEC What was the idea—pretending to be rich?

VERONICA (*coolly*) Well, I get six pounds a week Most secretaries only get about four

ALEC But why tell me all that nonsense?

VERONICA I was on a holiday, and pretending to be rich and grand was part of the holiday Besides, you were so pleased with yourself, and thought you knew everything, so I decided to take you down a peg or two

ALEC I don't think it was a very good joke

VERONICA I didn't afterwards And I wrote about six letters to you

ALEC (*hastily*) I never had them

VERONICA No, I tore them up But I would have written finally if I hadn't suddenly discovered we were coming up here How *are* you?

ALEC Broke Old Plumweather gave me the push, and all I'm doing now is a bit of work for nothing at the hospital

VERONICA I've been thinking a lot about you

ALEC I've been thinking a lot about you too In fact, you're a damn nuisance I think we'd better get married

VERONICA What—so that you can stop thinking about me?

ALEC Yes I want to get on with my work

VERONICA That's not a good enough reason Why do you want to marry me?

ALEC Because if I don't, I'd probably get tied up with a nurse, and I hate nurses

VERONICA In that case then I'd better marry you But if I'm going to work to keep us, you'll have to get up and cook breakfast

ALEC What do you have for breakfast?

VERONICA Only tea and toast

ALEC I can make tea and toast

They kiss but are interrupted by LORD FLEETFIELD

LORD FLEETFIELD (*amused*) Oh—Miss Frensham

VERONICA (*rather confused*) Oh—Lord Fleetfield, this is Dr Rothbury

LORD FLEETFIELD How d'you do? It's a pleasure to meet a young doctor who believes in the good old-fashioned treatment Now where is Mrs Cudden?

ALEC She's upstairs I'll tell her Don't go away

He hurries out LORD FLEETFIELD *looks quizzingly at* VERONICA

LORD FLEETFIELD I hope his intentions are dishonourable

VERONICA They're not We're engaged

LORD FLEETFIELD I congratulate him, though I suppose no woman is as good a wife as she is a secretary Being a secretary seems to bring out the best in a woman, and being a wife doesn't

WILL now appears from Card Room, carrying some documents

LORD FLEETFIELD Ah, Blofield I've sent for Mrs Cudden, we'll explain to her the arrangement we've come to

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

WILL She won't know what we're talking about

LORD FLEETFIELD Still the same blunt outspoken fellow, Blofield
What were you in this hotel before you broke into the market again?

WILL Night Porter

LORD FLEETFIELD That must have made a late arrival here something of an ordeal for any sensitive guest

WILL Don't you believe it I was a good night porter Wasn't I, Miss Frensham?

VERONICA You were sweet I think the only night porter I've ever really liked

WILL You see?

LORD FLEETFIELD How do you account for your success as a night porter?

WILL I'll explain I hadn't much power and I'd few worries, so it wasn't hard to be pleasant In many ways it's a more satisfying job than juggling with money For one thing, you've more time to think—and you're not so frightened of thinking Wouldn't suit you, though Head waiter would be more in your line

LORD FLEETFIELD You're probably right Almost the only men in London I still respect are one or two head waiters

He sees MOLLY entering She looks better than she did

Now, Mrs Cudden We're all ready Do sit down

He fusses her into a chair Then he and VERONICA sit, but not

WILL

MOLLY Sit down, William

WILL (*curtly*) I'm all right

MOLLY Oh dear, you're not going to sulk, are you?

LORD FLEETFIELD (*as WILL is about to reply*) No, Blofield, let me say something Mrs Cudden, we've come to a sensible friendly agreement, and I must tell you that throughout our friend has asked for nothing for himself and has only been trying to safeguard your interests

MOLLY (*warmly*) William!

WILL All right I don't want any votes of thanks now Let me explain what's happened I don't go to jail, *that's* settled

LORD FLEETFIELD (*firmly*) Quite definitely settled, whatever else happens

MOLLY That's all right then

WILL These chaps get what they want—control of the power we hold, but they'll guarantee you all the money you want to spend

You can have ten fur coats and a diamond suit-case It'll be wonderful (*He begins to walk away*)

MOLLY (*rising*) I don't won't ten fur coats and a diamond suit-case, you fathead And where are you going?

WILL (*turning*) I'm going to pack my bag

Stalks out MOLLY *is undecided for a moment whether to call him back, but then decides not to*

LORD FLEETFIELD Yes, you've only to sign the necessary documents, which give us the controlling interest we need, and then you can forget all about us You can draw as much money as you please And enjoy yourself Buy what you like Entertain Travel

MOLLY I see

LORD FLEETFIELD (*impressively*) There you are, Mrs Cudden It's an odd thought—and you might take this down, Miss Frensham—that if you and Blofield could have gone on a little longer, then without leaving this hotel you could have thrown your shadow across the world The fate of whole industries would have been in your hands You could have controlled commodity markets and, if you wished, created famines You could have dominated the political life of people at the other end of the world The fate of millions and millions of people you have never seen might have been in your hands A remarkable position to be in Though of course I've had some experience of it for some time now

MOLLY Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself I call it disgraceful

LORD FLEETFIELD What?

MOLLY (*with growing feeling*) Yes, disgraceful! But I felt it wrong from the start I watched it spoiling him—yes, and beginning to spoil me No proper work to do! Just gambling! And all that power Sitting here interfering with other people's lives, miles away I don't want to be mucking people's lives up for money, and I don't see why you should either No, I'm not signing your papers

LORD FLEETFIELD (*astounded*) But, Mrs Cudden, I don't think you realise the seriousness of the situation These enormous interests can't be left to look after themselves

MOLLY These enormous interests, as you call 'em, aren't going to be left to look after themselves The doctor explained what I could do, and a solicitor's coming to straighten it all out for me I don't know much about these things, but I do know it isn't right that one person should be able to interfere with and mess about the lives and happiness of thousands of other people

LORD FLEETFIELD Perhaps not But under the present system—

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

MOLLY (*cutting in*) We'd better put a stop to the present system And I'll make a start by giving all this controlling business to the people whose lives are mixed up in it, to the people of England

LORD FLEETFIELD In other words, you'll hand over your interest to the government, in the form of a public trust?

MOLLY Yes, that's it ε

LORD FLEETFIELD And do you suppose the government will manage these affairs any better than my friends and I would?

MOLLY Well, if they don't, we can change the government, can't we?

LORD FLEETFIELD (*smiling*) Possibly, though my friends and I generally have a hand in changing governments too

MOLLY I dare say But you won't have this lot—(*waving papers*)—to help you to do it I've made up my mind about that

VERONICA But, Molly, don't you want anything for yourself?

MOLLY Yes, I was coming to that Out of all this lot, I just want two things I want enough to keep and run this hotel—on my own lines And I want enough money to provide young Dr Rothbury a clinic

VERONICA Darling! That's perfect (*To LORD FLEETFIELD*) She can do that, can't she?

LORD FLEETFIELD Certainly The solicitor can arrange that

VERONICA Oh, Molly, that's wonderful

LORD FLEETFIELD Well, I've accomplished the more important half of my task, so I can't grumble (*Rising*) By the way, do you know if my old friend Lady Leadmill is still staying up here?

MOLLY Yes, she was staying here until we closed, and now she's across at the Grand

LORD FLEETFIELD Then I'll go to the Grand too, Miss Frensham Report to me there in the morning Good-bye, Mrs Cudden

MOLLY Good-bye, Lord Fleetfield Pleased to have met you

LORD FLEETFIELD Delighted to have met you Most unusual experience And—about this hotel of yours——

MOLLY Yes?

LORD FLEETFIELD Don't let your Night Porter read the financial Press

*He goes, the three of them having been standing near front door
MOLLY and VERONICA now come down*

MOLLY My dear, fancy me going on like that I don't know whether to laugh or cry Telling 'em all straight Though I wouldn't

have known how to do it if it hadn't been for the doctor—your young man

VERONICA (*excitedly*) Who's going to have this clinic Where is he?

MOLLY He was only waiting till we'd finished Didn't want to butt in, he said

ALEC *pops his head in through Main Door*

ALEC Hoy, Veronica! I want you

VERONICA Hoy yourself! You can't talk to me like that

MOLLY (*delighted*) Course he can Go on Pop off

VERONICA (*as she moves off*) Well, this time perhaps But I don't propose to be talked to like that all the time

Suddenly running off, with enormous enthusiasm, crying, partly off
Darling, you're to have that clinic We'll have a flat on the top floor

MOLLY *listens, smiling, then sighs as she sits down WILL now enters through Staff Door, dressed in a neat but shabby suit and carrying an old suitcase He looks at her She looks at him and rises slowly*

MOLLY (*reproachfully*) William! William!

He stops but says nothing

And where d'you think you're going?

WILL What does that matter? I'm not wanted here any more

MOLLY Who says so?

WILL You said so

MOLLY I didn't

WILL You as good as said so But there's one thing I want to tell you before I do go, Molly Cudden

MOLLY There's several things I want to tell you, William Lotless

WILL Well, listen to me first Don't think I went back into the market again just to make some easy money Not this time What do I want now with a lot o' money? Wouldn't know what to do with it I went back into the game to try and beat the smart boys again—see? And I did it Don't forget that—I did it

MOLLY I know you did, William But it was spoiling you again And you weren't happy

WILL That's nothing Ex-convicts my age don't expect to be happy That's at least something they learn But anyhow, I had my flutter, and I know what the game's worth If people had had any sense, they'd have stopped us years since But then people haven't any sense

MOLLY Don't you think I've any sense?

WILL Not much You had a bit when you were still a chambermaid It's a funny thing I've never been a chap to bother a lot with women But every time I've been badly let down it's been by a woman

MOLLY And I suppose I let you down, eh?

WILL You've said it, not me What did you ask from Fleetfield—a couple o' yachts?

MOLLY No And I didn't sign anything either

WILL (*astounded*) What!

MOLLY It's all going into a public trust All I asked for myself was enough money to give Dr Rothbury a clinic, and enough to run a little business of my own You wouldn't like a job in it, would you?

WILL (*picking up his case*) No, thanks I can manage without any pension And I don't want any woman to keep me

MOLLY (*going over to him to stop him going*) William, William, come here Who's talking about keeping you, you silly old chump? Now answer me one question Do you like working in hotels of this sort?

WILL No

MOLLY Why?

WILL You ought to know Because I don't take to most of the people who use this sort of hotel Too many idle greedy-guts

MOLLY (*artfully*) The trouble about you is that you just criticise I'll bet you've got no ideas of your own about running an hotel

WILL (*indignantly*) Of course I have! What d'you think I've been doing with my brains for the last couple of years? I'm a man of ideas

MOLLY (*artfully again*) That's what *you* say!

WILL Certainly it's what I say Running an hotel! Why, give me a place I could take a real interest in—and——

MOLLY (*cutting in, firmly*) You're engaged

WILL What? Where?

MOLLY Here, as manager

WILL What—is this the business you're going to run?

MOLLY Yes, but it'll be a new kind of hotel for Cheltingate, for people who've been working too hard and not just eating too much, for men who are some use in the world, for women who deserve to be waited on for a change—for real people Everything must be good but not too expensive That means I need a man of ideas to run it But of course if you don't feel up to it——

WILL (*cutting in, vehemently*) Don't be silly, woman, don't be

silly I'm the one man in England who could tackle this job for you
Good ideas! I've got thousands of 'em Why, look here——

Produces a note-book with great zest Enter, through Staff Door, MISS WEEKS and GEORGE

MISS WEEKS Mr Lotless——

MOLLY And we shall want you, Miss Weeks——

WILL Senior receptionist

GEORGE And what about me?

A knock or ring outside

WILL See who's there

GEORGE *lets in* LADY LEADMILL, *looking more monstrous than ever, followed by* MISS SELL

LADY LEADMILL (*in tremendous voice*) Where is Lord Fleetfield?
I was informed he was here

MOLLY He was here, but he went to the Grand to look for you

LADY LEADMILL Indeed Any letters for me here that you've failed to forward?

MISS WEEKS No, Lady Leadmill

LADY LEADMILL (*going towards desk, suspiciously*) Are you sure?

MISS WEEKS Absolutely positive

LADY LEADMILL (*sternly*) I prefer to make sure The posts here are *most* peculiar And several letters are missing

MOLLY (*confidentially to MISS SELL aside*) Here's a chance for you to get away from that old crocodile Come and work for us here

MISS SELL (*eagerly*) Oh—could I? Oh—that would be wonderful.
But——

LADY LEADMILL (*marching majestically towards door*) Miss Sell

MOLLY (*to the hesitating MISS SELL*) This is your chance—your only chance——

LADY LEADMILL (*commandingly at door*) Miss Sell

MISS SELL (*after giving MOLLY a pathetic little smile*) Yes, Lady Leadmill

She hurries out after her

WILL And that's half England

MOLLY Well, I'm disappointed It oughtn't to be like that

WILL Well, it is Millions and millions of Miss Sells——

Telephone rings MISS WEEKS answers it

MISS WEEKS (*telephone*) Yes? Oh yes, Mrs Gore I'll

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

just see, Mrs Gore (*To MOLLY, covering telephone*) Mrs Gore wants to know if she can stay She's very rich

MOLLY If she's very rich, tell her we don't want her (*To WILL*) I'm disappointed

WILL But look

MISS SELL *re-enters, looking excited and defiant, her hat rather askew, and carrying LADY LEADMILL'S umbrella, now broken, which she tosses on to the table*

MISS SELL When do I start?

MOLLY (*laughing*) Hurray!

WILL You start now Now look here——

Laughing and eager they all gather round WILL and his notebook and talk all at once as curtain comes down

END OF PLAY

HOW ARE THEY AT HOME?

A Topical Comedy in Two Acts

CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

KENTON, an old butler
HILDA PACKET, from the factory
EILEEN STOCKS, from the factory
SAM CAWTHRA, a factory foreman
LOTTA SCHULBERG, an operatic cook
LADY (FRANCES) FARFIELD
PAULINE CHESTER, a Land Girl
MAJOR GEORGE WEBBER, U S Army
RAYMOND KILLIGREW, a Civil Servant
COMMODORE PENTWORTHY, of the B L A D S
GROUP-CAPT EDWARD CAMYON, R A F
SQUADRON-LDR TONY ACTON, R A F
CORPORAL HERBERT PACKET, Hilda's brother

The Scene is Farfield Hall, Fassington, in the North Midlands, on
a Saturday night in Spring, 1944

How are they at Home?—Copyright, 1945, by Samuel French, Ltd

First produced at the Apollo Theatre, London, on May 4th, 1944, with the following cast

HILDA PACKET	ANGELA WYNDHAM LEWIS
KENTON	CHARLES GROVES
EILEEN STOCKS	PATRICIA LAFFAN
SAM CAWTHRA	GEORGE CARNEY
LOTTA SCHULBERG	HELLA KURTY
LADY FARFIELD	JANE CARR
PAULINE CHESTER	JENNIFER GRAY
MAJOR GEORGE WEBBER	JOHN SALEW
RAYMOND KILLIGREW	HENRY HEWITT
COMMODORE PENTWORTHY	MIGNON O'DOHERTY
GROUP-CAPTAIN	
EDWARD CAMYON	RALPH TRUMAN
SQUADRON-LEADER	
TONY ACTON	NOEL DRYDEN
CORPORAL PACKET	JOHN SLATER

ACT I

The Scene is the lounge hall of a fairly large country house. It is a lofty and imposing room, though it has obviously seen much better days. At back are very tall windows, through which park-like grounds can be seen. Left centre (actors' left) are large double doors which are main entrance to the room from outside. On left wall is a massive fire-place, and downstage left is a small door leading to kitchen, etc. Right centre shows foot of handsome old staircase, which curves up, out of sight. On right wall is large door leading to drawing-room, etc. A fairly long table of refectory type occupies centre of stage, and thus can have two long forms with it. Other small tables, easy chairs, etc. A telephone. Some vague family portraits and a few stuffed heads of animals on walls. A camp bed and a pile of blankets in one corner. The place is not dirty but it is dingy, untidy and dilapidated, though the general impression is rather of a cheerful bohemianism than of a depressing decay. At rise of curtain, KENTON, who is a very old butler, shabby and senile and almost out of his wits but still vaguely impressive, is making an effort to lay the table. The door down left into kitchen is open, and through it we hear the wireless playing a Viennese waltz and the still excellent voice of LOTTIE SCHULBERG singing to it. KENTON listens to this, with a kind of droll despair, then does his best to get on with his work. Bell rings. KENTON goes to answer door, then returns followed by HILDA, a lively North-country girl, and EILEEN, a shy pretty girl.

HILDA (*cheerfully*) She is expecting us, y'know

KENTON Yes, miss. I'll tell her ladyship you've arrived

HILDA Tell her it's Hilda and Eileen. You 'aven't seen Mr Cawthra—that's our foreman—'ave you?

KENTON No, miss. But I remember her ladyship saying that there would be three guests this evening

HILDA Mr Cawthra's the other one. I say—are you a butler?

EILEEN (*embarrassed*) Shut up—Hilda!

HILDA You don't mind me asking, do yer? Are you a butler?

KENTON (*gravely*) Yes, miss

HILDA (*delighted*) Well, I've always wanted to see one. I've seen dozens on the pictures. Well, will you tell her we've come

KENTON Certainly, miss, I'll inform her ladyship without delay

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

He goes out down left HILDA looks after him delightedly

HILDA "I'll inform her ladyship without delay" He talks just like 'em too You'd think he was doing it on purpose

EILEEN Perhaps he is

HILDA Well, I don't see any point in 'olding these things any longer Let's put 'em down 'ere

Makes a move towards centre table

EILEEN (*nervously*) I suppose we've come to the right place

HILDA Don't be dotty, Eileen Course we 'ave You 'eard him say so Three guests—that's us two and old Sam (*Looks round happily*) There's always a room like this in them mystery plays The body'll be in the libr'ry That'll be through 'ere (*She has gone down to door right and now opens it*)

EILEEN Hilda, you mustn't

HILDA There's only a sort of posh passage (*Coming in again*) Fancy old Farfy livin' 'ere'

EILEEN (*shocked*) You won't have to call her that here

HILDA (*pleasantly*) Well, she can't expect me to start any of this ladyship business, not after workin' with 'er in the Assembly shop for the last eighteen months

EILEEN Well, I don't suppose she will—but—after all—it is different for her here, isn't it?

Sound of LOTTA singing loudly and gaily from the kitchen

HILDA Just listen to that Proper singing too I wonder who that is (*She now goes towards kitchen door*)

EILEEN (*alarmed again*) No, Hilda, honestly you mustn't

KENTON comes out down left

KENTON 'Er ladyship will be free shortly—and asks if you would like to see the house

The singing stops

HILDA Well, this is it, isn't it?

EILEEN She means—have a look round, doesn't she?

KENTON Yes, miss Farfield 'All 'as many features of interest

HILDA All right And anyhow I'd like to have a wash

KENTON Certainly miss The main staircase is this way

He ushers them upstairs ceremoniously LOTTA recommences singing off, down left After a moment or two there are several rings at the front door Then SAM CAWTHRA enters, rather cautiously He is carrying some bottles of beer, etc, and smoking a pipe

ACT I HOW ARE THEY AT HOME ?

SAM (*calling, not too loudly*) 'Ullo! 'Ullo! Anybody at 'ome?

He puts down the beer, etc., on table, then hears LOTTA singing
He opens door down left and calls through

Ah say! Is this Farfield 'All? Heigh! 'Ave Ah come to t'right shop?

He steps back a pace or two, and LOTTA enters down left through open door. She is wearing apron, etc., for cooking

LOTTA Oh—hello!

SAM 'Ow d'yer do?

LOTTA You have not been sent to be billeted here?

SAM No, no, don't worry Ah'm only 'ere just for t'evening—that is—if this is Farfield 'All

LOTTA Yes it is Oh—you are from the factory where Lady Farfield works?

SAM That's right T'aircraft factory Sam Cawthra's my name

LOTTA Yes, yes—of course—I have heard Lady Farfield speak of you, Mr Cawthra And the two girls have already arrived

SAM (*pointing to the table*) Ah thought they must 'ave We've brought you a few things

LOTTA (*going to table*) Oh—but how wonderful! All these nice things They will make a great difference to the supper It will be a real celebration

SAM Well, that's the idea, isn't it?

LOTTA Yes, of course Beer too!

SAM Ay, an' it's not a bad drop o' stuff either for war-time An' Ah don't know about you, but after cycling five or six mile Ah'm parched an' could tak' a glass this minute What about you?

LOTTA Yes—I think that would be very nice—Mr Cawthra Here are some mugs (*One of them begins to pour out the beer*) Thank you But oh!—how stupid of me I must introduce myself Lotta Schulberg, once of the Vienna Volksopera—and now—well, an exile, you know Years ago, I was—what you call a star—in Vienna And now I do the house-keeping and cooking here

SAM (*shaking hands*) Good for you!

LOTTA That is very nice of you—Mr Cawthra

SAM An' you've kept yer voice an' all Ah 'eard yer An' Ah know a bit o' good singing when Ah 'ear it Yorkshire, yer know An' Ah'd like to 'ear some more later on

LOTTA That would be a very great pleasure for me Not because I want—as you say—to show off—but because when I sing—I forget Friends who are dead or have vanished come alive again—I see their

faces—I hear their voices—and the theatres, the cafes, the lovely old streets—of my city—they are alight again—but no—forgive me—I am being stupid——

SAM No, you're not You're all right Well—— (*raising his glass*) 'ere's to us an' to 'ell with 'Itler (*They both drink*)

LOTTA (*fiercely*) He has always been in hell—and that is why he destroys other people's happiness I should like to have come with Lady Farfield to make airplanes with you—but that was not possible—so—I do the cooking Perhaps one day I shall sing again in Vienna—if not—then I do something else—more cooking, perhaps It does not matter so long as *they*—the Nazi cheats and murderers—and all the people like them—have gone—and all nice simple friendly people—in Yorkshire—in Austria—anywhere—everywhere—can get to know each other and understand each other——

SAM That's right An' just let anybody try an' stop us, that's all We're getting our monkey up——

LOTTA (*baffled*) Your monkey up?

SAM Nay, don't bother with it Leave it (*Looking round*) Well, Ah'd think twice afore Ah'd want to live 'ere Tak' a bit o' lightin' an' warmin' an' cleanin', this place No great shakes really, is it, when you tak' a good look at it? The wife would want to 'ave a do at this if it were 'ers

LOTTA But it is impossible to know where to begin, with a house this size and no staff at all—except one old man And we have had dozens and dozens of people billeted on us

HILDA and EILEEN now come down, with KENTON

SAM Ah—'ere's the girls

KENTON I will see if her ladyship is disengaged now (*To SAM*) Good evening, sir Are you a member of the—er—factory party?

SAM That's right What about you?

KENTON Kenton, sir 'Er ladyship's butler

SAM Ah see Well, Ah don't think yer'll need to do much buttlin' for us to-night We can buttle for ourselves Big place you've got 'ere, isn't it?

KENTON Yes, sir We used to keep quite a large establishment 'ere at Farfield 'All, but of course, sir, times 'ave changed

SAM They 'ave, an' they'll do a lot more changing afore we've finished But don't let us keep yer, if yer busy

KENTON Thank you, sir I will inform 'er ladyship of your arrival

Goes out down left

LOTTA (*laughing*) Her ladyship, at this minute, is finishing cleaning her auto-cycle Poor old Kenton!

HILDA I can't get over 'im

SAM Takes it all seriously, doesn't 'e? Owerdoin' it, Ah'd say

LOTTA (*confidentially*) You must not mind him, please You see, he is very old, and he has been the butler here for a long, long time—and now he forgets and does not understand what is happening—and sometimes he thinks this war is the last war, and sometimes he forgets about any war, and often he thinks nothing has changed

SAM They might ha' found room for 'im in t'House of Commons But I must introduce yer

LOTTA (*smiling at the girls*) Lotta Schulberg—once of the Viennese Volksopera—now—in the kitchen——

SAM This is one of our Assembly girls—Eileen——

LOTTA You have beautiful eyes

EILEEN (*abashed but delighted*) Go on—I haven't—have I?

LOTTA But of course—and you ought to *use* them Has nobody ever told you? What a waste! Also, you have a sensitive refined nature Sometimes I know at once about a person I am rather psychic, you know (*To SAM*) Are you psychic, Mr Cawthra?

SAM No, whenever I know at once about anybody, Ah'm always wrong And this is another of our Assembly girls——

HILDA I'm Hilda What have I got?

LOTTA (*who doesn't know*) You have—(*she pauses impressively*)—very good luck—I think

HILDA Well, I doubt that

EILEEN (*hastily*) Oh you can't say that, Hilda—look at last Tuesday——

HILDA Never mind about last Tuesday—look at last Saturday—do you call that luck? Six miles to a dance—and it was the wrong night

EILEEN But that was only an accident——

HILDA (*loudly*) Well, if you 'ave good luck, you don't 'ave accidents——

Telephone rings LOTTA goes to answer it

LOTTA (*at telephone*) This is Farfield Hall—yes? All right—I wait——

HILDA Eileen, look!

EILEEN (*turning*) What?

HILDA (*pointing*) All them animals' 'eads

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LOTTA (*still at telephone, but to HILDA*) They are awful, aren't they, those stupid animals? (*Into telephone*) No, I am not talking to you—I am waiting——

SAM Big game 'unting, that's what that is One o' the favourite pursuits o' the leisure class at one time—big game 'unting Oi' Musso an' Fatty Goering wouldn't look bad up there wi' glass eyes in

LOTTA (*into telephone*) Yes Farfield Hall—yes Ministry of *What?* is there such a Ministry? (*Laughs*) Well, I think it is very comical Well, what is it you want? No, Mr Fleming is *not* here any more Yes, he was *everybody* has been billeted here but he left yesterday Yes, I saw him go And good-bye to you

Puts down telephone and turns to visitors, smiling

Why are they always so stupid, those girls on the telephones of ministries? And now I must take these beautiful presents into the kitchen and prepare for supper But first I wish to tell you we are all so proud—so very proud—that Lady Farfield is now a *charge-hand* It is wonderful I said at once we must have a little party—to celebrate A charge-hand

SAM That's right And not done by influence, y'know

LOTTA (*proudly*) No, no—not at all She has worked her way right from the bottom right up to the top

SAM Well, not quite to the top But Ah know what yer mean

LOTTA And I tell you this Do not be afraid

SAM All right, Ah won't be But why?

LOTTA Lady Farfield will be strict—but just She will give you your orders—so——

SAM (*aghast*) Give me orders!

HILDA (*impressively*) He's the foreman

LOTTA (*impressed*) Oh—I am sorry—of course—the foreman

SAM All right, yer needn't look at me now as if I wor Stafford Cripps But Ah 'ave bin on t'job a long time Ah wor putting planes together when some of yer 'adn't started undressing yer dolls

LOTTA (*gaily*) For me—I wish it was true But now I really must return to the kitchen (*Taking up things*)

EILEEN Can I help you with supper? I'd quite like to

LOTTA (*going down left with things*) Yes, certainly, thank you, in a little while perhaps But you would like to see Lady Farfield first, of course (*She is now at door, opening it*) Here she is

She holds door open and LADY FARFIELD enters, still in greasy overalls

LADY FARFIELD Hello, hello, everybody!

SAM, HILDA, EILEEN Hello, (etc.)

LOTTA Look what nice things they have brought us for supper

LADY FARFIELD Oh—I say—how marvellous

LOTTA Now—I make something—very good You'll see For how many?

LADY FARFIELD Just us—and Pauline—and Kenton, I hope

LOTTA I hope too But I doubt it Somebody always arrives We have had everybody now except the Red Army and the Jugoslavians Partisans

She goes out LADY FARFIELD *smiles at the visitors*

LADY FARFIELD I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting, but I did want to finish cleaning my auto-bike Well, what do you think of this place?

HILDA Big, isn't it?

SAM And it 'ud tak' some keeping up

LADY FARFIELD Yes, it's big—and it just can't be kept up I told you it's hopelessly untidy and neglected, so I won't apologise It looks awful and I can't help it Before the war there were ten servants here Now there's a woman from the village who comes in occasionally—Lotta, who's sweet and a great help but can't be expected to start scrubbing—and poor old Kenton——

SAM An' 'e's a bit barmy, isn't 'e?

LADY FARFIELD I suppose so He never knows quite what's happening And then—apart from Pauline, the Land Girl, that's the lot To keep this huge place going—I ask you!

EILEEN And then you have people billeted on you all the time, don't you?

LADY FARFIELD We've had thousands of them You heard what Lotta said Half the United Nations war effort seems to have been through this house You could look round at the damage and write the history of the war from it We started, in 1939, with fifty women and children from Sheffield. When they went back home, the battalion headquarters of the Loamshire Light Infantry arrived After them, the Polish Air Force Then—let me think—yes, sixty-two women and children from Bootle After that, Anti-Aircraft and Searchlights Then a company of A T S Then the Civil Service, mostly with colds Then—some assorted Americans—with the Bob Hope and other programmes in full blast, day and night But now—at last—nobody Just ourselves to-night Isn't that wonderful? The last four people who were billeted on us left yesterday, so to-night we have the place

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to ourselves That's why I was so anxious for us to have our little party And here we are!

KENTON *enters from down left with tray, bottle of sherry and glasses*

Thank you, Kenton I thought we'd have a quick drink—it's real sherry—and then I'd rush off and change Will you pour out the drinks, Mr Cawthra—

SAM *(correcting her)* Sam

LADY FARFIELD Sam No, don't you bother, Kenton

Telephone rings sharply KENTON goes to answer it, as the others cluster round the drinks, and EILEEN and HILDA light cigarettes

KENTON *(at telephone)* Farfield Hall—yes I will see if 'er ladyship can speak to you What name?

LADY FARFIELD Who is it?

KENTON *(vaguely)*. A person wishes to speak to you, me lady, on official business

LADY FARFIELD *(going over)* Oh dear—I don't like the sound of this *(At telephone)* Yes—Lady Farfield speaking Oh, no! Oh dear, dear, dear, dear Why? Because we hoped not to have anybody at least just for this week-end We've had *everybody* all the time No, if you can't, you can't Of course Who are they? Two Air Force officers possibly? Well, that's all right—

HILDA *(with enthusiasm)* Certainly it's all right

LADY FARFIELD But there's some doubt about them, you say?

I see, these other two are certain Not women, I hope—wanting cups of tea and hot-water bottles Oh I see An American officer, yes And who else? *(Delighted)* A servant? *(Dashed)* Oh—a Civil Servant Ministry of Reconstruction To-night? Any time now? No, only I'm giving a little party for a few friends Very well, we'll do our best Yes, I know, but you can't cook and eat ration cards, can you?

Puts down telephone and looks at the others with droll despair
Let's hope they're both so tired they'll go straight to bed

KENTON More guests, me lady?

LADY FARFIELD Yes Two gentlemen for certain—to-night

KENTON Very good, me lady Shall I give instructions for two of the bachelor rooms in the East Wing to be got ready for the gentlemen?

LADY FARFIELD *(half laughing, but touched)* No, Kenton, you must

try and remember that you can't give instructions because there isn't anybody left to give instructions to

KENTON (*confused*) I'm sorry, me lady—I was forgetting——

LADY FARFIELD (*gently*) I know It doesn't matter But you're forgetting too that we haven't been able to use the East Wing for the last two years, not since we had those incendiaries No, I'll see to their rooms

KENTON Yes, me lady (*Goes out down left*)

EILEEN We can help with the rooms

HILDA If you'll show us where they are

LADY FARFIELD That's sweet of you It would be a help I hoped we'd have the place to ourselves to-night Just for once

HILDA What'll the Civil Servant be like?

LADY FARFIELD Probably dull but harmless Let's hope he'll creep away with a good book As for the American officer, he might be terribly nice——

HILDA I know—like Gary Cooper

LADY FARFIELD Yes, he *might* Then again, he might be very dull, one of the slow boring kind On the other hand, he might be a bit *too* lively—you know——

SAM I've seen 'em

HILDA (*eagerly*) What about those Air Force chaps they're sending?

LADY FARFIELD Two officers may have to be sent up here from the Experimental Station, but it isn't certain, so don't count on it

HILDA I don't care I like sergeants best They're not so fancy, and you can understand what they're talking about

LADY FARFIELD I really must change—and get those beds made up

EILEEN We'll help you

LADY FARFIELD Come on, then Sam, you must amuse yourself for a few minutes But Pauline ought to be coming in any time now

SAM Who's Pauline?

LADY FARFIELD She's our Land Girl Rather peculiar but quite a nice child really You have a talk to her

The three women go upstairs, leaving SAM with his pipe He looks round, notices the stuffed heads, and is particularly fascinated by a very ugly buffalo head—or something of the sort He takes a chair to stand on, and has a close look at it Slowly he lifts a hand to touch its nose—the action being in full view of the audience Meanwhile, PAULINE CHESTER, in Land Girl uniform and carrying

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a basket of vegetables, etc, has entered She is a rather small girl, in her early twenties, quite attractive, but with a precise, didactic though calm manner that is quaint and incongruous When she sees what he is up to, she quietly goes up to him unnoticed

PAULINE I shouldn't do that if I were you

SAM (*surprised, turning on his chair*) Do what?

PAULINE Feel its nose You were going to feel its nose, weren't you?

SAM (*slightly embarrassed*) Well—as a matter o' fact—I did just want to see what it felt like No 'arm in that, is there?

PAULINE No But I did that with one of them when I first came here—it was a buffalo shot in Uganda in 1909

SAM Well, what 'appened?

PAULINE The whole beastly thing came down and nearly smothered me They can't take it, y'know Everything here is very ramshackle and dilapidated Including this chair, actually——

SAM (*with touch of alarm*) Oh—is it? (*Gets down at once Then he grins at PAULINE*) You're Pauline the Land Girl, eh?

PAULINE Yes Who are you?

SAM Sam Cawthra—foreman of Assembly—where Lady Farfield works

PAULINE I see You're not billeted here, are you?

SAM No Just 'ere for t'evening Bit of a party

PAULINE Yes, Lady Farfield said something about it Can I get you anything?

SAM Well, I'll 'ave another drink o' this beer I brought I reckon nowt o' sherry an' suchlike

PAULINE Neither do I We'll both have some beer Then I'll drop these vegetables and eggs into the kitchen

SAM Eggs, eh?

PAULINE Three But one of them's rather odd Actually, I think the hen that laid it—Red Lizzie—is going mad

SAM 'Ow can yer tell?

PAULINE By her general behaviour I hope you're not hungry

SAM Well, I'm fairly peckish Why? (*She drinks*) Cheers All the best! (*Drinks, then surveys her with interest*) Yer know, I'd call you a pretty cool card How d'yer like being a Land Girl?

PAULINE Until I came here I didn't like it Not because I minded the work, but I hate farmers I was with three before I got this job, and they all hated me, and I hated them

SAM What's wrong with 'em?

PAULINE (*coolly*) Greedy, selfish, miserable old blighters After the war, we ought to take a few out and shoot 'em

SAM (*aghast*) Shoot 'em!

PAULINE Yes, shoot 'em And a few fat old business men Make all the difference

SAM Mak' plenty o' difference, no doubt—but nay—dash it—yer can't start shootin' folk like that

PAULINE Why not? Thousands of nice young men, who've never done anybody any harm, are being shot and drowned and burnt to death Why shouldn't we shoot a few nasty old men, who are always doing everybody harm?

SAM Ay—but—there's a lot o' difference between chaps bein' killed in a war an' then just shootin' people 'cos you don't like 'em

PAULINE I don't see any, except it would do some real good killing off a few of these nasty old men who are so greedy and selfish and stupid

SAM My word—you're a bloodthirsty young woman an' no mistake Where were you brought up?

PAULINE (*rather primly*) I was brought up chiefly by a maiden aunt in Cheltenham

SAM You've gone a long way since then I should think Russia's about your style now

PAULINE (*coolly*) If this country doesn't improve, I shall go to Russia—if they'll have me—and work on a collective farm

SAM But 'aven't yer got a young man?

PAULINE No, so far I haven't bothered But I've been thinking lately that perhaps it's time I looked around for one

SAM 'E'll 'ave to be careful after yer do find 'im One wrong move an' you'll be shooting 'im Well, there's one or two chaps comin' to-night so yer'd better look 'em over One's an American officer

PAULINE Americans don't attract me Their attitude towards sex is so adolescent

SAM 'Ere, are there any more Land Girls like you? I thought we were seein' summat these days in t'factory, but we know nowt

PAULINE You're not being rude now, are you?

SAM Bless yer 'eart, no! I was just talkin' free-an'-easy, like I would to any chap I was 'aving a glass o' beer wi' Nay, nay, don't tak' offence

PAULINE No, of course I won't But I'm not very good at telling whether people are being rude or just rather matey And you seemed

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such a nice man at first that I was disappointed (*Now she smiles at him*) But now it's all right

SAM Course it is The best o' friends

They shake hands solemnly HILDA now comes hurrying down the stairs, calling across to SAM as she reaches lower steps

HILDA (*calling*) Mr Cawthra—Sam!

SAM (*rising*) Well, what is it?

HILDA You understand about putting beds together—nuts and bolts an' all that—don't yer?

SAM (*moving*) Course I do Am I wanted upstairs?

HILDA Yes, and I'm not Straight along at the top—you'll 'ear 'em talking

He goes up and she comes across to PAULINE

You're Pauline, the Land Girl, aren't yer?

PAULINE Yes Will you have some beer?

HILDA No, I think I'll take a drop more of this sherry wine, if you don't mind My name's Hilda Packet, and I work with Lady Farfield and Sam at the factory There's two of us come with 'im—two girls, I mean—'cos we all started about the same time as Lady Farfield in one of the machine shops—an' then we all went to Assembly—so we're sort of friends, yer see—well, as a matter of fact, the one upstairs, Eileen, and me—we're very great friends 'Ere, are yer interested, 'cos I can shut up if you're not?

PAULINE No, I love it You see, I spend all day with hens and geese and cabbages, and you don't get a word out of them Go on about you and Eileen Where do you live?

HILDA (*immediately in full flood again*) Oh—we're in the same billet—Mrs Batsby's 'Er 'usband used to keep a garage, but that's gone now and 'e's at the factory too—so Mrs Batsby looks after five of us—'er an' 'er sister—the sister's older than Mrs Batsby—old maid she is—and nosey!—she's awful The minute you're out, she's runnin' through everything you've got—an' no shame about it neither "You'll catch your death o' cold, wearin' them things underneath," she'll say An' another time, she says, "I wouldn't have nothing to do with that chap you've got the photo of," she says "That corporal, I mean—'e's up to no good, I can tell by his photo" An' I says, "Well, if you must know, that's my own brother 'Erbert—an' in future you mind yours an' I'll mind mine" Oo, I was that mad at 'er

PAULINE And was it your brother's photograph?

HILDA Just as luck would 'ave it, yes it was our 'Erbert's photo But after that I gave it to Eileen, 'cos 'er an' 'Erbert started writin'

to each other They've never seen each other, but I'd told 'im about 'er—'cos she's my friend—an' she knows all about 'im An' one day she says, "I wish I'd a soldier in Africa or somewhere to write to"—'cos Eileen's very shy, an' doesn't bother much with boys—says she doesn't care about 'em, but yer know how much that's worth—so I says—yer know, just for a bit o' fun—I says, "Well, write to our 'Erbert—yer can 'ave 'im for me" So she did, an' 'e writes back, an' now they've been at it for months—writin' an' writin'—though God knows what they wrote about I don't see 'ow they can find enough to write about, not when they've never seen each other—do you?

PAULINE Yes If I once started writing to a boy, I could write reams and reams and reams

HILDA What about?

PAULINE Oh—everything About what I do here—about Horace the old gander and Red Lizzie the mad hen—and about the Ministry of Agriculture and Reconstruction and the Coming Revolution

HILDA Oh—you're one o' these brainy ones, aren't you?

PAULINE (*firmly*) Yes I am I have a lot of time to think while I'm working, and I've thought about *everything*

HILDA Well, I suppose it's all right if yer fancy it I can't be bothered Eileen tried it one time—read books an' all that—an' talked to Miss Wilson—our welfare officer—but when she started writin' to our 'Erbert, she packed it up an' just thought about 'im instead, though 'ow she can do that for long beats me, knowin' 'Erbert But I believe if anything 'appened to 'im, she'd 'ave a broken 'eart I'll bet you don't believe in broken 'earts, do yer?

PAULINE No, I don't

HILDA I bet yer don't believe in 'ardly anything, do yer?

PAULINE (*in calm oracular manner*) I believe in the triumphant destiny of Man

HILDA Crumbs! Is that all?

PAULINE (*same manner*) No, I believe in the irresistible forward march of Man towards a classless world of peace, prosperity and justice

HILDA Go on! 'Ere, what man's this?

PAULINE Just Man All men

HILDA Well, they'll 'ave to be a lot diff'rent from the men I know Anyhow, be a bit careful what you say to Eileen

PAULINE I'm never careful what I say to anybody Don't believe in it.

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HILDA And I'll bet yer don't

PAULINE But I won't hurt her feelings, if that's what you mean

HILDA Peculiar sort o' girl you are Do yer talk to boys like this?

PAULINE Certainly I've only one way of talking But I'm not always thinking about boys I believe you are You ought to be married

HILDA Are you telling me!

There is a sound of a car arriving outside

That's a car Somebody's come Let's have a look

They go to window at back and look left

PAULINE (*as she looks*) American Army car It must be the American officer who's coming to stay

HILDA (*also looking*) I wonder what he's like Oh!— (*disappointed*) That must be 'im, getting out 'E's rather old, isn't 'e? Specs too Oh—I don't think much of 'im

PAULINE (*moving down*) We must let Kenton attend to this I shall go in the kitchen and help Lotta You'd better come too

HILDA (*moving too*) All right So long as it's not peelin' potatoes

Front door bell is heard and KENTON comes out left

PAULINE There's an American officer at the door, Kenton

KENTON Thank you, miss

PAULINE and HILDA exit down left

WEBBER'S VOICE (*off*) Say, is this Farfield Hall?

KENTON Yes, sir This is Lady Farfield's residence

WEBBER'S VOICE (*off*) Fine! (*Calling back to driver*) Okay, Joe—this is it Pick me up in the morning, will you? Yeah, about quarter to nine Good night

As WEBBER comes in, sound of car going off MAJOR GEORGE WEBBER is a fairly plump, clean-shaven, colourless type of Middle-Western American, wearing large octagonal spectacles, in his early forties He is a pleasant man with a slow solemn manner He is carrying some brand-new luggage

WEBBER enters, followed by KENTON with suitcases

WEBBER I'm Major Webber—George Webber I've been sent along here by headquarters

KENTON (*polite, resigned*) Yes, sir

WEBBER (*delighted by the thought*) Now—to me—you look like a butler

KENTON (*mildly surprised*) Yes, sir

WEBBER Well, well, well! It took a war to bring me over here to meet a butler How are you?

Holds out a hand, which KENTON, after some hesitation, shakes
What's your name?

KENTON Kenton, sir

WEBBER What comes before it—Joe,³ Jack, Sam?

KENTON As a matter of fact, sir, my Christian name is—Frederick

WEBBER Fine! Shall I call you Frederick—or just Fred?

KENTON Neither, sir, if you don't mind—

WEBBER Now—go on—I don't need any of this feudal stuff—I'm just a plain democrat—

KENTON (*with dignity*) Sir, when I am on duty, I am accustomed to being addressed as Kenton Only close relations and old friends would call me Frederick or Fred And if I may say so without giving offence, sir—should you insist upon calling me Frederick or Fred, then you are not only ignoring the custom of this and other English gentlemen's houses, but you are also intruding into my private life, sir

WEBBER (*slowly*) Do I understand what you're talking about?

KENTON (*looking him in the eye, slowly*) I think so, sir

WEBBER Okay—Kenton (*Looking around*) Well, well, you got quite a place here, haven't you? One of the stately homes of England

KENTON Yes, sir

WEBBER I guess nobody's going to run a home like this on a nigger and a boy

KENTON A nigger and a boy? Certainly not, sir The staff here, sir, is ten indoor servants, and five outdoor

WEBBER (*both shocked and delighted*) Ten indoor servants and five outdoor! Well, sir—we've been asked not to criticise—but I must say I just don't know how you folks justify such a use of man-power at a time like this

KENTON (*ignoring this*) When the late master—afterwards Sir Robert—celebrated his twenty-first birthday, sir, we sat down twenty-five in the servants' hall—and three hundred of the tenantry had their supper in the grounds

WEBBER Tenantry, eh? Just old feudal customs still going on And twenty-five sitting down in the servant's hall, eh? When was this—since the war began?

KENTON In nineteen-hundred and three, sir

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WEBBER Oh—way back That's different Still— (*shaking his head*) Ten indoor servants—five outdoor—

KENTON (*proudly*) It takes three to polish the silver properly

WEBBER (*shaking his head*) Fiddling while Rome burns

KENTON (*same manner*) When the Hunt meets here and we have a Hunt Breakfast—

WEBBER Hunt Breakfast! Now, do you mean red coats and packs of dogs—

KENTON (*reproachfully*) 'Ounds, sir—not dogs

WEBBER Hounds or dogs, I'd think you folks would be too busy these days to waste time, money and man-power on keeping up these feudal customs I'm just a plain American—

KENTON (*politely, but with touch of irony*) Yes, sir

WEBBER And I'm here to defend the American way of life I'm from the Middle West, Kenton—Indiana—and out there we're just plain folks

KENTON Quite different 'ere, sir But you'll soon get used to it

WEBBER Well, it'll certainly be most interesting to get acquainted with some of your old-world aristocratic customs Mrs Webber'll get a kick out of it

KENTON Who will get a kick, sir?

WEBBER Mrs Webber

KENTON No lady of that name 'ere, sir

WEBBER No, no, I know there isn't, but my name's Webber and Mrs Webber's my wife Say, I'd better go up to my room and wash up Where is it?

KENTON (*rather confused*) I'm not quite certain yet, sir I'll 'ave to enquire I did give instructions that two of the bachelor apartments in the East Wing were to be made ready for you and the other gentleman, but I am now under the impression, sir, that those instructions have been countermanded Perhaps you will take a seat, sir, while I enquire

WEBBER Be glad to

He sits down and lights a cigarette while KENTON slowly goes upstairs After a moment, LOTTIE peeps out of doorway left, sees WEBBER, and comes in smiling He notices her, and politely rises and holds his cigarette in his hand

LOTTIE Good evening How do you do?

WEBBER Fine, thanks! I'm Major Webber, just arrived The butler told me to wait till he found out about my room.

LOTTA He will probably forget to come back I am Lotta Schulberg Did you know Vienna in the old days?

WEBBER No, this is my first trip to Europe You from Vienna?

LOTTA Yes, I used to play leading roles with the Vienna Volks-opera Do smoke, please Is that a nice American cigarette you are smoking?

WEBBER (*producing packet*) Certainly is Will you have one?

LOTTA Thank you very much You know, I adore American cigarettes

WEBBER Well, take the whole pack——

LOTTA Oh—no—I could not do that—— (*She takes the packet and puts it in her pocket*)

WEBBER (*heartily*) Go on Glad for you to have them Mrs Webber's going to get a big surprise when I write and tell her I've met a Viennese operatic star You staying here too?

LOTTA (*as she lights a cigarette from his lighter*) Oh yes—I am the cook Supper will be ready in twenty minutes Good-bye for the present

She goes off down left humming gaily as she smokes and WEBBER stares after her in astonishment He has no sooner returned to his seat, than SAM, smoking a pipe and in his shirt-sleeves and holding a large spanner, comes down nearly to the bottom of the stairs and calls

SAM Oy!

WEBBER (*turning, surprised*) Me?

SAM Ay Sorry yer've bin kept waiting, but them iron bedsteads wor in a 'ell of a tangle an' I've only just sorted 'em out Shan't be long now, though 'Ave a drop o' that beer if yer fancy it

WEBBER Not right now, but thanks all the same

SAM An' d'yer mind answerin' t'door if t'other chap comes 'cos I've got old Whoosit 'elpin' me

WEBBER (*puzzled but helpful*) Be glad to, though I don't know my way around here Say, are you another butler?

SAM (*aghast*) Me! I'm t'foreman from Assembly shop in t'air-craft factory Butler!

He goes upstairs and WEBBER is left absolutely bewildered Before he has recovered from his surprise, PAULINE enters briskly

PAULINE How do you do? Is it Lebber or Webber?

WEBBER Webber

PAULINE Lotta wasn't sure I'm Pauline Chester—member of the Women's Land Army attached to the estate here

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WEBBER (*shaking hands*) Fine! I hear you girls are doing a great job

PAULINE (*very briskly*) Britain now produces two-thirds of the food she needs Six million more acres have been ploughed up The agricultural production per head is now probably the highest in the world After the revolution, when we have collective farming, it will be higher still

WEBBER (*doing his best*) But are you going to have a revolution?

PAULINE (*calmly*) Certainly If it comes soon it can be peaceful If we wait, then it will be sudden, violent—and bloody And I don't care which

Makes as if to come towards stairs

WEBBER Now wait a minute, Miss Chester—

PAULINE Call me Pauline, if you like Everybody does

WEBBER Okay Pauline then—

PAULINE (*holding up a finger*) But no reactionary talk, no Wall Street stuff—

WEBBER (*exasperated but not out of temper*) Say, wait a minute What about your fifteen servants?

PAULINE Fifteen servants?

WEBBER Yeah Ten indoors, five outdoors—three to clean the silver—

PAULINE Where?

WEBBER Why, right here

PAULINE There aren't any servants here (*Smiling calmly at him*) Excuse me!

She goes quickly upstairs He has not recovered from this fresh shock when the front door bell peals loudly After a moment's hesitation, he goes towards the main doors at back and opens them just in time to admit RAYMOND KILLIGREW, who comes staggering in with an immense double armful of old luggage, including two violin cases and bags, etc KILLIGREW is a carelessly dressed, scholarly-looking and somewhat eccentric man in his fifties, with a quick staccato way of talking He dumps the bags, etc., down and goes out for another load, talking rapidly and loudly all the time His second load consists of string quartette scores, tied in bundles

KILLIGREW Farfield Hall, eh? I was lucky—very lucky Local farmer gave me a lift, otherwise might not have been here for hours Int'esting fellow in his way too Gave me some useful information Didn't know the American Army was here But no reason why they

shouldn't be, of course Damned heavy, these things Quartette scores Take 'em with me everywhere Well, well, here we are

He lights his pipe and looks round cheerfully

Untidy—rather dirty—I imagine—and obviously neglected—but probably got very good acoustic properties My name's Killigrew

WEBBER I'm Major Webber

KILLIGREW How d'you do? Billeted here?

WEBBER Yeah But only just arrived That's my baggage And—say—I don't seem to get the hang of it here at all

KILLIGREW New to the country perhaps?

WEBBER Yeah Only landed last week But as I was saying, I just don't seem to get the hang of it—

KILLIGREW (*cutting in ruthlessly*) You soon will Don't worry Play the fiddle or the 'cello?

WEBBER (*surprised*) No, I don't

KILLIGREW Pity Always hoping to make a up string quartette That's why I carry the scores round with me Farmer gave me one possible name, though—got the telephone number somewhere—

WEBBER (*while KILLIGREW is searching*) There's an operatic singer in the kitchen

KILLIGREW Let her stay there Detest opera Cheap hysterical muck, most of it Ah, here it is Telephone anywhere? Yes, I see

Goes over to it at once, glancing at the number

Oh—Fassington Two Five Three, please Yes All right

WEBBER (*as KILLIGREW waits*) I didn't know they billeted civilians in this country

KILLIGREW Certainly We've billeted millions—war workers, land girls, civil servants I'm a Civil Servant Ministry of Reconstruction New Ministry I used to be with the Board of Trade

WEBBER Is that so, Mr Killigrew? What did you do there?

KILLIGREW Closed things down Thousands of businesses—

WEBBER (*awed*) Closed 'em down?

KILLIGREW Yes, thousands of 'em (*At telephone*) Oh—is that Mr—er—Bramley? Well, my name's Killigrew, and I'm staying at Farfield Hall and I'm told you have two daughters who play the viola and the 'cello respectively and I want to get some string quartettes going Oh, they are both of 'em, eh? Yes, good girls, but that doesn't help me Do you happen to know any other people who play the fiddle round here? All right, thanks very much

(*To WEBBER*) Gone to ask his wife Both his daughters are Wrens. What were we saying?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

WEBBER You were telling me that you are in this new Ministry of Reconstruction, Mr Killigrew, which interests me quite a lot. Tell me, what do you people propose to do?

KILLIGREW We don't know yet. There are two schools of thought. One school says "Go straight on. Make a peace effort just as we made a war effort." The other school of thought, if you can call it that—*(To telephone)* Hello, yes? But how old? Eighty? No use, I'm afraid. Yes, Fraser?—Coinland Three Four? What's the other name? Henniman. Not on the telephone. I see. Well, thanks very much. Good-bye.

Puts down telephone and lights his pipe again

I'll try that number later. The other fellow isn't on the telephone, and they don't think he's played for years. But you never know. What were you asking me?

WEBBER This other school of thought, as you called it—y'know, about Reconstruction.

KILLIGREW Oh—yes. Well, their bright idea is to put everything back to where it was before the war.

WEBBER And can you do it?

KILLIGREW My dear sir—here are some eggs all scrambled in the pan—and here, on the side, are all the empty shells—and all they ask you to do is to unscramble the eggs and put 'em all back neatly in their shells. And while they're about it, they might as well ask us to put the eggs back into the hens.

WEBBER Say—Mr Killigrew—you're not my idea of a British Civil Servant.

KILLIGREW Why? Too short, too tall, too old, too young, too fat, too thin—what?

WEBBER Well, there you go. I expected you'd be kinda slow and pompous. But you think and talk fast—more like a business man.

KILLIGREW *(horried)* Business man! Good heavens! *(Looks about him)* Where is everybody? We must see about our rooms.

Enter HILDA from kitchen with some things for the table—bread, etc. KILLIGREW sees her.

Oh—good evening. I'm Mr Killigrew. Billeted here. Where is everybody? What about our rooms? What happens?

HILDA *(sharp but not bad-tempered)* What 'appens? Well, for one thing, I come out for the evening, after working 'ard all the week, an' I find myself 'elping to get supper ready. Rest o' the party's upstairs putting yer bed's up. *(To WEBBER)* I say, what are you?

WEBBER *(rather startled)* Me—well, what do you think I am?

HILDA I can never tell by them things you wear what you Americans are I was out with one of your boys one night and I asked 'im to tell me, but 'e couldn't keep 'is mind on it

WEBBER (*laughing*) Well, our boys certainly take some holding, when there's a pretty girl around

HILDA (*direct, not coquettish*) Would you call me pretty?

WEBBER Certainly would And I'm a major—Major Webber, Surveying Department, U S War Department

HILDA Oh—surveying I thought you looked a bit old to be a real soldier

To KILLIGREW, who is sniffing curiously at the sherry bottle
What you sniffing at that for? D'yer want some?

KILLIGREW What's it supposed to be?

HILDA Sherry wine

KILLIGREW Most peculiar

HILDA Want some?

KILLIGREW No, thanks

WEBBER I've got a bottle of Scotch in my bag, Mr Killigrew, and I'll be glad if you'll join me in a drink when I get it out

KILLIGREW Delighted

HILDA Well, don't finish it between yer 'cos we're supposed to be 'aving a bit of a party 'ere—to celebrate—

KILLIGREW What are you celebrating?

HILDA Lady Farfield—she lives 'ere, y'know—an' she works with us at factory, an' she's just been made a charge-and

WEBBER (*astounded*) A charge-hand?

HILDA Yes, an' not before time neither Y'ought to 'ave seen some o' the charge 'ands we've 'ad, specially down in the machine shop! They didn't know whether it was Christmas or Tuesday, some of 'em didn't

WEBBER (*earnest and bewildered*) I don't get the hang of this at all I thought Lady Farfield was a member of your old privileged classes—

HILDA If yer'd seen 'er coming through 'ere 'alf an hour since, after she'd been cleanin' her auto-bike, in 'er mucky old overall, yer'd 'ave thought she was Black Jack from the boiler 'ouse Supper'll be on in a minute or two Yer'd better get washed

She marches off into kitchen

WEBBER (*bewildered*) Mr Killigrew, all this is new to me, and will you do me a favour and put me wise to what's going on around here—

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KILLIGREW (*surprised at his bewilderment*) Nothing special, is there? A little party of some kind Saturday night, y'know Don't suppose they'll keep it up late or make too much noise—so I shouldn't worry

WEBBER (*in despair*) No, you've got me wrong But what about—well, that butler—and three men to clean the silver—and Hunt Breakfasts—?

KILLIGREW Hunt Breakfast? Can't have a Hunt Breakfast, my dear chap Be reasonable Lucky to have any kind of breakfast I haven't drawn a bacon ration for months Always in the wrong place Ah—here we are

He says this because he sees LADY FARFIELD coming to the bottom of the staircase LADY FARFIELD is now properly dressed and looks a fine handsome woman Behind them are EILEEN and SAM, PAULINE and KENTON

Lady Farfield?

LADY FARFIELD (*smiling*) Yes I'm so sorry you've been kept waiting

KILLIGREW Not at all Hope we're not a nuisance, arriving so unexpectedly My name's Killigrew And this is Major Webber

LADY FARFIELD (*shaking hands*) How d'you do?

WEBBER (*who has not recovered yet*) Very pleased to meet you, Lady Farfield, and I feel it's a great privilege to stay in your lovely home

LADY FARFIELD I'm afraid it's not very lovely now, but it was once

WEBBER And I'll bet you get quite a nostalgia for the good old days, don't you?

LADY FARFIELD Very rarely They were much more comfortable, of course, but they were often very dull And whatever we are now, we're certainly not dull Now come along, everybody Let me introduce you Major Webber and Mr Killigrew—Miss Eileen Stocks and Mr Sam Cawthra, who work with me—and that's Miss Pauline Chester, our Land Girl And Kenton you've met already Now let's get all these things upstairs so that you'll be in time for supper

KILLIGREW and WEBBER take some of their things and SAM and KENTON take the rest

EILEEN What shall I do?

LADY FARFIELD Well, if you feel you must do something, will you go into the kitchen and help Lotta—I think Hilda's there Pauline can help me to finish laying the table

EILEEN (*preparing to go*) I wish I knew how to cook

LADY FARFIELD You can learn how to cook

EILEEN I'd like to It must be awful getting married if you don't know how to cook

She goes into kitchen LADY FARFIELD *and* PAULINE *finish laying the table*

LADY FARFIELD Poor Eileen's mind is rather running on marriage—because of Hilda's brother, who hasn't even seen her yet

PAULINE (*calm and clear*) I think I shall marry somebody

LADY FARFIELD (*amused*) Do you mean—just anybody?

PAULINE Oh no—that would be stupid, of course In fact, I shall select the young man very carefully

LADY FARFIELD Have you found him yet?

PAULINE No, I've only just made up my mind about it

LADY FARFIELD Well, I think it's better to fall in love first

PAULINE I don't see why you shouldn't marry first, while you're still clear-headed and know what you're doing, and then fall in love with the man afterwards Do you mind if I ask you something?

LADY FARFIELD No, Pauline

PAULINE Well—I know you lost your husband—Sir Michael, wasn't it?—since the war But you never seem to talk about him Were you very much in love with him?

LADY FARFIELD No I was very fond of him, of course We had a happy marriage on the whole But he was older than I was—and—well, before that, there had been somebody else I was in love with—only we had a stupid quarrel—so I married Sir Michael I'd better luck than I deserved, but it isn't really a good idea—to marry one man just because you're angry with another one Don't ever do it, Pauline

PAULINE I wouldn't, you know I think I'd marry the one I was angry with, and then take it out of him afterwards

LADY FARFIELD You might not want to, then

PAULINE Then that would be all the better, because I don't really believe in taking it out of people I don't believe in quarrelling with people I like either

LADY FARFIELD Who does? But when you're in a highly emotional state—and are very excited about somebody—it's easy to quarrel You wait, my dear You won't always be so cool, calm and collected

PAULINE I didn't used to be, y'know, but when I decided to be a Land Girl and take to the good brown earth and the beasts and the

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fowls and the vegetables, I also decided at the same time to be calm and quiet and *firm*—

Telephone rings

LADY FARFIELD Oh dear—now what is it this time?

PAULINE If you don't answer it, then it won't matter what it is

HILDA *comes in with a dish of some kind—e g salad or vegetables*

HILDA Telephone

LADY FARFIELD We're wondering whether to answer it

PAULINE And I say—*don't*

HILDA (*shocked*) Oo—but you must answer the telephone, mustn't you? If I'd one, I'd never dare not to answer it

LADY FARFIELD (*as she goes*) I rather agree with you, Hilda. It simply *demand*s to be answered (*At telephone*) Yes speaking

Who? Oh, is she? Any minute, eh? All right, thank you

Puts down telephone and looks at both girls

What a nuisance! "Commodore Pentworthy is on her way, apologises for having been detained, but will now be here at any minute" I'd clean forgotten she was coming for supper to-night Oh dear—oh dear!

PAULINE Is that the terrible woman in uniform who came here once before, the one I had the stinking row with?

LADY FARFIELD That's the one And to-night, Pauline, there mustn't be a stinking row

HILDA I never 'eard of a woman Commodore before

LADY FARFIELD Phyllis Pentworthy is my husband's cousin, and years ago she organised a mysterious little gang called the British Ladies Auxiliary Defence Squadron—otherwise the *Blads*

HILDA What do they do?

LADY FARFIELD I've never been able to find out, except I know that they wear uniform and salute each other—but they're so old-established and grand and exclusive that they've never been merged into the Waaf or the Wrens

PAULINE If you ask me, they're just barmy

LADY FARFIELD They occupy a dreary old mansion called Brindlewell Priory, about twenty miles from here And Phyllis Pentworthy is their chief officer, and calls herself Commodore—though nobody knows why

PAULINE She's a frightful reactionary

LADY FARFIELD Not *really* She's just idiotic But whatever she is, she's on her way here—and we'll have to make the best of her

PAULINE I ought to warn you—that somebody told me her gang were being turned out of Brindlewell Priory, and she's probably plotting to billet the lot of them here——

LADY FARFIELD (*alarmed*) Oh—no! Don't say that She hinted at it the other day at the telephone, and I told her this house was most unsuitable I laid it on thick

HILDA (*as she goes towards kitchen*) [?]Then this time we'll 'ave to lay it on still thicker

PAULINE You can't tell that Commodore female anything She's just a woman Blimp in solid ivory

LADY FARFIELD (*surveying the table*) Well, we're not going to wait for her

PAULINE We ought to open this wine somehow

LADY FARFIELD Kenton'll do it He'll love opening it The poor old thing doesn't get much of a chance these days to show what he can do Now then—I wonder if Lotta is ready (*She goes down nearer kitchen, calling*) Lotta! Lotta!

HILDA *returns, leaving the door open behind her, and bringing in more things*

HILDA She's ready now She's just dishing up the stew

LADY FARFIELD And I'll bet there's everything in that stew but the kitchen stove

HILDA No, there's some of the kitchen stove in it too She's been telling me about their opera company in Vienna Some real daft goings on When I tell me mother an' our 'Erbert, they won't believe a word I say

Enter LOTTA, triumphantly carrying a large dish of stew

LOTTA Now we are ready It is a new kind of stew—with bits of yesterday's rabbit and the American Pork Luncheon meat—and beetroot and cabbage——

LADY FARFIELD It smells nice, Lotta

LOTTA Yes, somehow it smells better than it tastes

HILDA That's the beans Yer've 'ad 'em near moth balls

KENTON *enters from kitchen carrying a large gong and stick, followed by EILEEN*

PAULINE Kenton's going to have a lovely time now You can go upstairs with it to-night, Kenton

LADY FARFIELD And after that, please draw the curtains everywhere, will you, Kenton?

KENTON Yes, me lady Can I sound the gong now, me lady?

LADY FARFIELD Yes, we're ready

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KENTON, *with great pomp, begins sounding the gong, and goes upstairs with it*

HILDA (*shouting above gong*) Proper warnin' I call it

LADY FARFIELD You can begin serving, Lotta And we'd better light up here Will you and Hilda do the curtains, Pauline?

She switches on the lights while PAULINE and HILDA draw the curtains at back EILEEN and LOTTA are dishing out the food There is now the sound of a car outside

HILDA (*calling from curtains*) There's a car

LADY FARFIELD That'll be the Commodore

EILEEN Who's that?

PAULINE (*grimly*) You'll see

Sound of front door bell

I'll go

She does and ushers in COMMODORE PHYLLIS PENTWORTHY, who is a determined-looking, square, middle-aged woman, dressed in a very imposing uniform suggesting a general in some exotic revolutionary war She has a gruff staccato voice and a curt, military, aggressive manner

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*striding in*) Hello, Frances! Sorry if I'm late

LADY FARFIELD No, that's all right

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Lucky to get here at all really Having to move headquarters Not sure yet where we're going Had to leave this telephone number with my A D C, though the girl's a perfect fool Think I know some of these people, don't I?

PAULINE (*pointedly*) You've met me before

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Have I?

LADY FARFIELD And you know Lotta And this is Eileen Stocks and this is Hilda Packet, who work with me

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY How d'you do?

LADY FARFIELD Have a drink, won't you, Phyllis?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Thanks Don't mind a short drink

SAM has now arrived downstairs

LADY FARFIELD This is Mr Cawthra, our foreman—Commodore Pentworthy

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY How d'you do?

SAM (*looking her over*) Just middlin' Commodore, eh? New to me What's—er—what's yer regiment—like?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*curtly*) I'm Commodore of the Blads

ACT I HOW ARE THEY AT HOME ?

LADY FARFIELD, *who has been pouring out sherry, hands glass to* COMMODORE

SAM (*surprised*) Lads What lads? D'yer mean—like Boys Brigades?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Certainly not Blads Stands for British Ladies' Auxiliary Defence Squadron Oldest of the women's defence services

SAM Is that so? What d'yer do?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Well, we're really just headquarters now Plenty of difficult administrative work to do, of course Not a bad sherry this, Frances

LADY FARFIELD So glad Have some more?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Just a spot

SAM That officer and the Civil Servant's just coming down

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY What officer's this you're talking about?

LADY FARFIELD One of our two new billetees—arrived to-night American

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*dismissing the whole U S A*) Oh—American

SAM (*with mock anxiety*) They're all right, aren't they—Americans?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY All right in their place I say, Frances, how many rooms have you got here? Must have scores—surely

LADY FARFIELD Yes, Phyllis, but they're hopeless Haven't been used for years *Can't* be used for years, most of them

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Possibly not, by civilian standards But my girls are used to roughing it

LADY FARFIELD (*alarmed*) Now, now, Phyllis, you couldn't possibly move your gang in here—simply don't think of it

PAULINE (*loudly*) One whole wing has been damaged by incendiaries

LADY FARFIELD Oh yes—no good at all

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Like to see for myself Mind if I look round afterwards?

LADY FARFIELD Yes I do You simply couldn't dream of moving in here—ah, at last!

WEBBER and KILLIGREW, *who have tidied up and had a drink, followed by* KENTON, *now arrive* WEBBER *is carrying an open bottle of whisky*

WEBBER I apologise if we're late

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LADY FARFIELD No, you're just in time Phyllis, this is Major Webber—

WEBBER Pleased to meet you

LADY FARFIELD Mr Killigrew Commodore Pentworthy

KILLIGREW How d'you do?

LADY FARFIELD Shall we all sit down? Supper's getting cold Will you sit at the head of the table, Sam? Mr Killigrew, Commodore, and Major Webber next

WEBBER Say that's quite a uniform Kind of Waaf, I guess

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Then you guess wrong British Ladies' Defence Squadron much older than the Waaf—or the Wrens Much higher standard too

PAULINE Higher standard of what?

They take their places at the table

LADY FARFIELD Hilda, will you serve the salad? Pauline, pass the bread Oh—Kenton—would you like to open that bottle of wine?

KENTON Certainly, me lady

KENTON takes it and opens it in the background

WEBBER (*hospitably*) Here's some good Scotch, if anybody prefers it How about you—er—Commodore?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Glass of wine for me, thank you

WEBBER Lady Farfield?

LADY FARFIELD No, thank you But I'm sure Mr Killigrew would like some

KILLIGREW I've had one taste of it already, but I won't say No to another Any of your girls play the fiddle, Commodore?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Not to my knowledge Don't encourage that sort of thing Physical jerks Saluting drill Get 'em out in the open and keep 'em busy

PAULINE Busy at what?

LADY FARFIELD I hope nobody minds this stew It seems to me—rather—mixed

LOTTA (*almost tearfully*) It is terrible One of my worst

PAULINE The tinned herring fishcakes were the worst Sometimes during the night I can still taste them

LOTTA Darling, they were simply a bad *idea* Are you a musician, Mr Killigrew?

KILLIGREW Play the fiddle, when I have a chance to Quartettes' mostly

LOTTA (*gaily*) That is wonderful After supper, I could sing the waltz from *Fledermaus*, and you could improvise an obbligato on your violin

KILLIGREW Don't like that sort of stuff, I'm afraid

LOTTA (*disappointed*) Oh!

PAULINE But even if you don't like it, perhaps the rest of us do, and surely you wouldn't object to doing one small thing to please the rest of the party

KILLIGREW (*who can take it*) Telling me now I'm a selfish old highbrow, are you?

LADY FARFIELD (*hastily*) Oh no, I'm sure she wasn't

KILLIGREW Yes, she was And she's right—I am But remember, madam, I don't get much time to myself Been working twelve—sometimes fourteen—hours a day for the last four years—and no extra pay, remember—no overtime—no nice canteens and extra rations—blitz, black-out, everything However, as this is a party, I'll play anything you want me to There!

WEBBER (*solemnly*) Mr Killigrew, I think that's a pretty swell attitood

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*loud, challenging*) Most of these war factory workers have been so well off they'll be sorry when the war's over

SAM That's nobbut true of a few Rest 'as got 'usbands or sweet-hearts away, and they're as anxious as you for t'war to be ower—'appen a bit more anxious

LADY FARFIELD And it's not true they've been so well off Getting up in the dark, perhaps travelling miles—then working all day in a machine shop—then getting back home in the dark, too tired to do anything—month after month, year after year—away from your husband, perhaps away from your children—doing hard monotonous work—often living with people who don't want you there—I don't think that's being well off

HILDA If it is, then they're not doin' so bad in Dartmoor

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Yes But most of them are not in the least patriotic I know that for a fact

SAM 'Appen not what you'd call patriotic—flag-wavin'—King-and-country stuff—upper-class fancy work But for all that, they've always wanted this country to come through After Dunkirk, I saw 'em work till they dropped at their benches—

WEBBER That's what they told us on the other side And it sure is a great story—yes sir—a great story That—and the Battle of

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Britain—and the bombing of London We had it over the radio every night

KILLIGREW I'd just as soon have a blitz as the radio every night And I've had my share of air raids Without wishing to boast, I must point out that I'm probably the only man in history who was ever blown clean out of his chair while practising the second violin part of the first movement of Beethoven's A-minor quartette, Opus One hundred and thirty-two

LOTTA (*suddenly pointing at KILLIGREW and giving a scream of laughter*) Of course—I see now—you are really a comical man—a droll

KILLIGREW Good heavens!

KENTON *has gone round serving those who wanted it, and are not taking whisky or beer, with wine There has also been some changing of plates, etc, with perhaps LOTTA and PAULINE or HILDA leaving the table*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY You been over here long, Major Webber?

WEBBER No, I haven't Only landed a few days ago

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Indeed! What d'you think of it here?

WEBBER Oh—you seem to me to have done a swell job, though of course I haven't quite got the hang of things around here One minute I imagine you British are going on in the same old way, and then the next minute—why—I begin to think you're having a kind of revolution

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*shocked*) Revolution! Certainly not Simply tryin' to do our best for the national cause Got into uniform—obeyin' orders—and so on Nothing to do with revolution No sign of one, eh, Mr Killigrew?

KILLIGREW Words, words, words! Depends upon what you mean by revolution Suggest we drop the subject

WEBBER Have you ever been to America, Commodore?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Yes, once Didn't take to it

WEBBER That's too bad Why didn't you?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY I object to taxi drivers calling me "Sister"—

WEBBER Aw—well—they don't mean anything by it—

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY I didn't imagine they did mean anything by it But I didn't like it Then again, the hotels and houses were too hot, the waiters inefficient, and there were no egg cups, no toast racks, and my shoes were never cleaned

WEBBER (*polite but annoyed*)— Say—listen——

LADY FARFIELD (*cutting in*) Now Major Webber, you simply mustn't mind what Mrs—I mean Commodore Pentworthly says And, Phyllis, we can't have you talking like that Remember, this is a special little party——

HILDA Yes, an' Sam wants to say something Go on, yer promised

SAM (*rising slowly*) Well—er—friends—when I thought there was just goin' to be a few of us from t'factory, I'd agreed to say a few words—proposin' a 'ealth really—to celebrate t'occasion Yer see, we're 'ere to-night to celebrate t'promotion o' Lady Farfield She's just bin made a charge-'and—see? Nah that mightn't sound so much to some of yer, but we think she's done very well—an' I'll tell yer for why An' mind yer, I speak as an old 'and, havin' bin in t'industry a good long time But Lady Farfield, she wor new to it, o' course It wor as strange to 'er as knitting a pair o' socks 'ud be to me—in fact, worse, 'cos I could at least try me 'and at that in private at 'ome Well, she started down in t'machine shop, same as t'others—ay, an' 'ad plenty o' mucky little jobs an' all, 'cos there's one or two of 'em down there as I know that 'ud go out o' their way to give somebody like 'er muckiest job, d'yer see?——

EILEEN (*with unexpected vehemence*) Yes, they would too Stinkers!

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*with a look*) What did you say?

PAULINE (*loud and clear*) She said “Stinkers” And quite right too

SAM (*with good-natured reproach*) Now oo's talkin'—me or you lot? Any'ow, point is—Lady Farfield worked 'er way up to Assembly, which is best shop we 'ave, an' now she's a charge-'and An' I say we ought to drink 'er 'ealth Nah—then——

He raises his glass and the others, except LADY FARFIELD, rise and raise their glasses—murmuring the usual phrases As they resume their seats, there is much applause, especially from the younger ones LOTTA suddenly bursts into noisy sobs

LOTTA (*through her sobs*) I am so sorry—but this reminds me so much—of—of—the old days—oh——

She runs to the kitchen, still sobbing

PAULINE I never knew such a one for being reminded

LADY FARFIELD Poor Lotta!

SAM 'Ere, we want a speech from you

Cries of “Yes, go on”—“Speech!”, etc

LADY FARFIELD (*rising*) Oh—well—thank you very much, Sam—

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and all of you I'm really very proud—and grateful I haven't always liked it at the factory——

HILDA I should think not!

LADY FARFIELD All the people there aren't like you three—worse luck—but though I only went at first because I was desperate for something useful to do, I'm glad now that I did I've met people—and made friends—that I couldn't have known before I understand a lot of things—important things—that I didn't begin to understand before I can face the future properly and in the right spirit I feel that—in my own very humble way—now I can help—and not hinder—the new England most of us want That's all

Some applause as she sits down

KILLIGREW A most admirable little speech, if you'll allow me to say so, Lady Farfield

WEBBER Swell! I'd like to send a copy of it to Mrs Webber

LADY FARFIELD But I haven't a copy of it, I only said the first thing that came into my head

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY And I must say, Frances, that I don't agree with you

LADY FARFIELD About what?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Woman in your position could have found something more important and useful to do than going to a factory You remember, I suggested your joining the Blads

LADY FARFIELD No, Phyllis, I don't believe I could have done anything more useful——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Nonsense! Woman with your background! When any half-witted girl can look after those machines——

HILDA 'Ere, 'alf a minute with yer 'alf-witted girls

WEBBER Well, I've seen something of mass production back home, and I can see what the Commodore's getting at You see——

SAM (*cutting in*) Now 'old on a minute Nobody's goin' to tell me she'd ha' bin more useful swaggerin' round in a uniform, playin' at female soldiers——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*thundering*) Who's talking about playin' at female soldiers?

SAM (*who can't be intimidated*) I am What we needed most of all for this war wor production—planes, tanks, guns an' suchlike—an' that's what the machines wor turnin' out If uniforms could beat 'Itler, then Poles an' French 'ud ha' beaten 'im afore we started. But yer needed armaments an' machines to mak' them armaments an' folk to look after the machines

WEBBER Yeah—but everybody can't be—

HILDA (*cutting in*) No, Sam's right

PAULINE (*quickly*) And even if he isn't, *she's* wrong

LADY FARFIELD (*hastily*) Now, Pauline, be quiet

KILLIGREW But though you may need production first, man-power must be used properly, and a woman who—

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*cutting in, loudly*) I say, a woman with your social background and experience could have employed herself to better advantage Otherwise what's the use of a good social background and experience?

PAULINE (*loud and rude*) Well, what *is* the use of it?

HILDA Girls I know in the Ats and Waaf spend half their time sitting about—

KILLIGREW That's not the point, young woman Kindly stick to the point

WEBBER Quite so Question of use of man-power You don't want a square peg in a round hole

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Exactly Why a square peg in a round hole?

PAULINE Why pegs in holes at all anyhow?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*crushingly*) We're trying to be serious, if you don't mind

SAM (*cutting in*) Well, just get back to my point—

WEBBER (*cutting in*) No, you made your point—

LADY FARFIELD (*cutting in*) Look here, this doesn't really matter—

KILLIGREW (*cutting in*) No, but if we're going to argue, we might as well argue properly Now I contend—

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY If you'll kindly not interrupt for one moment—

EILEEN (*topping them all*) Oh—please be quiet!

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*outraged*) I beg your pardon!

EILEEN (*bravely*) Oh—I didn't mean you specially I meant everybody We're all beginning to make silly quarrelling noises, that's all, and it simply isn't worth it

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*to crush her*) Indeed?

EILEEN (*not crushed*) Yes—indeed

The telephone rings KENTON *emerges from the background*

KENTON Shall I answer the instrument, ~~me~~ lady?

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

LADY FARFIELD (*rising*) No, I'll answer it And you'll all *have* to be quiet for a minute It's difficult to hear if you're not (*At telephone*) Yes speaking Oh they are, are they? Had dinner? Well, I'm glad of that because there isn't much left I see All right, thank you (*Puts down telephone, to others*) Those two Air Force officers are on their way here I suppose they're the same two they mentioned earlier, though she didn't say so

HILDA Hurray!

LADY FARFIELD Come from overseas too Now we'll have to hurry Some of us will have to get their rooms ready Pauline and Sam and I had better do that Major Webber and Mr Killigrew, you two had better go along to the drawing-room—we'll join you there afterwards—might have some music—and dancing perhaps—

HILDA That's the stuff

LADY FARFIELD Phyllis, you needn't do anything, of course

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*firmly*) I should like to go round the house again, Frances, and see what accommodation you really have—

LADY FARFIELD All right, if you must—but don't dream of dumping any of your girls on me here Now then—Eileen, Hilda—will you help Kenton to clear—and Lotta to wash up I hope Lotta's recovered We really must be nice and friendly and cheerful—for the sake of these boys

KENTON *exits down left with a tray* HILDA *follows him with another*

SAM Come on, Pauline, back to the furniture job—

They go upstairs with LADY FARFIELD EILEEN goes on clearing, but leaving the bottles and a few glasses WEBBER lights a cigar and KILLIGREW a pipe They have now withdrawn from table, and the COMMODORE lights a cigarette and joins them

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*to the two men*) Look here—I'll show you where the drawing-room is Along here I might as well start on the ground floor My headquarters are over at Brindlewell Priory, but we're being turned out this week-end Frightful nuisance Follow me

They go out by the door down right Re-enter HILDA with tray

HILDA (*as she clears*) When she come out with that about 'alf-witted girls looking after machines, I could 'ave slapped her big fat silly face

EILEEN (*as she clears*) Still, you must admit that some of our girls are almost half-witted, you know, Hilda

HILDA All right But I'll bet they're no worse than what some

of 'ers are—all dressed up to look like somebody shoutin' outside a picture theatre (*Imitating commissionaire*) "Standm' Only In the One an' Threes Seats at 'Alf a Crown" That's what she oughta be dom'—wi' that uniform on

EILEEN (*bashfully sentimental*) I wonder what your Herbert's dom' to-night, Hilda?

HILDA Writin' a letter to you, I should think 'E'll ha' got to page twenty by now An' my mother could never get ten words out of 'im Even that time 'e won four-pound-five at dogs, 'e wouldn't tell it to her properly

EILEEN He's told *me* all about that night

HILDA I'll bet 'e 'as

EILEEN I wish I'd sent the other photo to him now—y'know, the one half sideways It's a lot nicer

HILDA Yes, but the other one's more like you

EILEEN Now don't say, that, Hilda I get so worried about it, wondering what he'll think when he does see me

HILDA Don't you bother about 'Erbert I know 'im He'll 'ave to think you're wonderful now that 'e's used all that paper an' pencil on you 'E never did like wasting anything

EILEEN (*indignantly*) He's not mean

HILDA I never said 'e was, though I can't say 'e ever gave 'is little sister much But what I want to know now is—what these Air Force chaps'll be like

EILEEN I don't care about them

HILDA No, you don't 'cos you've got our 'Erbert But I could do with a bit of Air Force attention for a change Will they be our sort, like them sergeants who come round the factory that time? Or will they be like them officers who came round that other time—that very 'igh-class bunch, you remember? (*Imitates them*) They 'alf-closed their eyes an' stroked their fancy moustaches an' went round sayin' "Wizard—absolutely wizard!" But when they thought we couldn't 'ear 'em, they were mutterin' to each other, "Black show, old boy"

They go into the kitchen, leaving door ajar, and through it we can hear music, LOTTA singing, laughter Sound of car arriving Ring at bell KENTON comes out slowly and answers it, admitting two R A F officers The first, GROUP-CAPTAIN EDWARD CAMYON, D S O, is a well-set up man about the same age as LADY FARFIELD The other, SQUADRON-LEADER TONY ACTON, D F C, is a high-spirited younger man who wears one of the fancy moustaches

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

*Both men are very sun-burned as if newly come from overseas
They have bags with them*

CAMYON I think you've had a message about us from the R A F Experimental Station

KENTON Yes, sir, we 'ad a message and 'er ladyship's expecting you gentlemen I'll inform 'er of your arrival We 'ave—er—various guests to-night—

TONY Yes, sounds quite like a party

KENTON Yes, sir Oh—we 'ave very big parties 'ere at the Hall at times, sir Bands playin', dancin', singing' Sometimes I'll 'ave as many as a dozen extra waiters in, as well as our own ten indoor staff Yes, sir Very big parties I'll inform 'er ladyship

KENTON goes upstairs There is a louder burst of music, song, laughter from kitchen, at this moment After taking this in, CAMYON turns indignantly to TONY

CAMYON (*angrily*) What did I tell you?

TONY Yes, sir, black show! How's the head now, sir?

CAMYON Not so good Well, you see what it's like at home You saw last night in town, at the filthy little night club you insisted on our going to—

TONY I took a poor view of that, as you know, sir

CAMYON All right That's bad enough But we come down here—and what's happening? This Lady Whatsit has nothing better to do than throw a party You can hear 'em Listen to 'em And that old fool of a butler says they're always throwing parties Bands! Dozen extra waiters Ten indoor staff By thunder, Acton, it makes my blood boil There weren't any bands and extra waiters for our chaps who went to Berlin and never came back And think of our fellows in Italy and the Middle East and India—worrying about how they are at home, longing to get back—and some of these people here—damned empty-headed, stupid, rich women—

TONY Couldn't agree with you more, sir Black show! Not that I can't take a party—

CAMYON Of course, of course No objection to people enjoying themselves when they've earned it But this sort of thing is a damned disgrace These women have no imagination, no sense, no decency They don't realise what's happening in the world They don't even care I've been out of this country four years and this is what I come back to find Parties! Extravagance! Rows of servants! Callous idiocy!

TONY Yes, sir, doesn't look too good Take a poor view of it myself, sir But from what I've heard, I think it must be exceptional

CAMYON Doubt it, Acton But exceptional or not, it's damned disgraceful I've half a mind to tell this fool of a woman here—what's her name—Lady Fairfield—Fairfield—or whatever she calls herself—just what I think about her and then walk straight out of her house

TONY Serve her right, sir But where do we walk to ?

CAMYON (*irritably*) What does that matter ?

TONY Well, sir, isn't a bed for miles, they said at the station

CAMYON (*angrily*) Filled up with dance bands and waiters and lounge lizards, I suppose Well, I suppose we can put up with the idiotic antics of these people for one night, but I don't propose—

TONY (*hastily*) Somebody coming, sir

LADY FARFIELD, with PAULINE behind her, now comes down the stairs

LADY FARFIELD (*advancing*) Good evening I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was just— (*Then she recognises him*) Edward !

CAMYON (*staggered*) Frances ! Are you Lady Fairfield ?

LADY FARFIELD Yes Didn't you know ?

CAMYON (*bitterly*) No, but I might have known, I ought to have guessed

LADY FARFIELD (*annoyed by his tone*) What on earth do you mean ?

CAMYON (*loudly and angrily*) I might have known, after being overseas for years, and coming back home to a place like this where people can still give parties every night, and fling money away, and keep rows of servants waiting on them, and generally behaving like callous idiots, that somebody like you would be mixed up in it—

LADY FARFIELD (*cutting in, furious*) Just a minute ! I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't believe you do either, Edward Camyon But of all the pompous, pig-headed, insufferable—why, for years I've waited for this

CAMYON (*aggressively*) For what ?

LADY FARFIELD (*advancing on him*) This !

She gives him a loud slap on the face Then stands glaring at him He stands amazed PAULINE gives a little gurgle of delight

TONY (*in a kind of loud dazed murmur*) Black show, chaps ! Black show !

LOTTA and the music from the kitchen swell up magnificently as they stand there and the curtain falls

END OF ACT ONE

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ACT II

At rise, LOTTA is discovered arranging drinks—MAJOR WEBBER's whisky, beer, a jug of lemonade, and a jug of sinister reddish liquid—and glasses either on the centre table or the small serving table MAJOR WEBBER is good-naturedly giving her a hand and can be handing over some drink or glasses when we discover them Dance music heard off

LOTTA Thank you, Major Webber But please go on with your story It is so interesting to me—this American business life

WEBBER Well, so I said to them, "Gentlemen, I want you to bear in mind that we have right here one of the biggest canning plants east of Chicago, and also that we're turning out more windshield wipers and other automobile accessories than any other city in the state, and that—"

LOTTA (*who is really bored by this stuff*) Yes, it must be a wonderful life So rich, so exciting, so—*strong*!

WEBBER Well, yes, certainly is—in a way—

LOTTA But for a woman—no No, no, no, no (*Smiling at him*) And after all I am a woman

WEBBER Sure thing! Well, then I said to them, "Another point I'd like you gentlemen to bear in mind," I said, "and I'm not going to try teach you anything about business conditions in general, but I'm a real-estate man and I'm here in my own home town—yes, sir—"

LOTTA One minute, please You 'ave not heard me sing properly yet, of course, but you have heard me a little You like my singing?

WEBBER Swell So I said, "Now gentlemen—"

LOTTA (*cutting in*) 'This dress—it is nothing, of course—just for the kitchen But all the same, it is rather pretty, eh?

WEBBER Swell So I said, "And don't forget another thing, gentlemen This town is producing right now a bigger and better assortment of patent steel fasteners than any place between Pittsburgh and Kansas City—"

LOTTA (*cutting in*) No, no.

WEBBER Why yes, we were doing just that thing We were producing bigger and better—

LOTTA (*cutting in*) No, I mean—oh, you would not understand But I am so glad you had so many steel fasteners!

HILDA *looks in through doorway to drawing-room*

HILDA Hey, Major Webber, I thought you wanted to do some dancing

WEBBER I'm raring to go

HILDA Well, come on then

She withdraws WEBBER *turns to* LOTTA

WEBBER You coming along?

LOTTA No, thank you Not just now

WEBBER See you later then Pardon me!

He goes through door to drawing-room LOTTA *gives a last look round at her drink arrangements, then sits down and sighs, obviously bored and rather melancholy* After a moment or two, SAM comes down the stairs, comfortably smoking his pipe

LOTTA Mr Cawthra—this party of ours—where is it? What has happened to it?

SAM Well, yer might say it finished afore it got properly started Though Ah'm not grumbling Ah'm feeling all right

LOTTA Well, I am not feeling all right I feel—very disappointed—rather sad What about the two Air Force officers?

SAM Well, after that Group-Captain got 'is face slapped, 'e stamps up to 'is room an' says 'e's stoppin' there Won't 'ave nowt to do wi' this carry-on at all An' 'e gave that young Squadron-Leader orders to stop in 'is room too, an' 'ave nowt to do wi' us So we've lost t'Air Force

LOTTA But why does not Lady Farfield come and settle everything and make everybody happy?

SAM 'Cos as soon as she'd slapped 'er old friend's face, she run straight up to 'er room an' locked 'erself in to 'ave a good cry

LOTTA (*thoughtfully*) So! They knew one another before the war And now, when they meet again, she slaps his face and goes to her room to cry Then I think she must still love him at least a little

SAM (*dryly*) I suppose if she'd knocked 'im silly an' then screamed the place down, she'd 'ave loved 'im a lot, eh?

LOTTA (*seriously*) Yes, of course

SAM The gentle sex!

LOTTA (*tenderly reminiscent*) I remember one of my lovers—oh, I adored that man—he was our leading baritone—and every time I saw him I wanted to take him and beat him and pull his hair out by the handful Sometimes I did too—and then he would twist my arms until I screamed (*Dreamily*) It was wonderful—love in Spring in Vienna—wonderful!

SAM All right so long as yer wor i' good training for it Well, that's all I can tell yer about this party, except that that female General-Admiral is still upstairs making a list o' t'rooms

LOTTA I do not care about that woman She is all wrong

SAM Ay, though if she ever retires on a pension, she might mak' a good time-keeper

LOTTA (*ignoring this, with decision*) But then all of us are all wrong Look at me!

SAM I see nowt wrong wi' you

LOTTA Yes, yes, everything is wrong These clothes! When I still have some beautiful dresses All these girls They too should be wearing beautiful feminine things—romantic, seductive, glamorous—and then these men would not behave so badly—you would see

SAM I don't know that the men 'ave been behavin' badly Unless you're goin' to blame that Group-Captain for puttin' his face in the way of Lady Farfield's 'and

Enter HILDA and EILEEN through door right, looking rather bored Dance music has stopped now

HILDA Well, I must say it's turning out a dam' dull party I've already had enough of dancing with that American officer Yer go bouncing round on 'is tunic as if he'd just given 'imself another medal What is there to drink?

LOTTA Anything here But—— (*she indicates a dark red liquid in a glass jug*) I would not touch that stuff There were two bottles from the chemist—and the labels came off—and I think I have used the wrong one

EILEEN (*smelling it*) Smells to me like liniment

LOTTA If that is the liniment, then Kenton has been rubbing his back with black-currant juice

HILDA We'll give Commodore Pentworthy a nice stiff glassful o' this That's something to look forward to, but we could do with a few more ideas

LOTTA (*impressively*) I have a nice idea But I must talk first to Lady Farfield

Enter KILLIGREW and PAULINE from down right, deep in talk

KILLIGREW (*obviously concluding an account of his troubles*) So I ask you, what is a man to do?

PAULINE (*calmly*) You ought to shoot a few of them

KILLIGREW (*seriously*) The idea's attractive—but quite apart from the fact that there might be a question or two in the House, my department has no authority or machinery for shooting people It

would have to be referred to the Ministry of Home Security and the War Office

PAULINE Well then, choose fifty of the worst of the big fat crooks, and send them up to the coldest moors to make roads

KILLIGREW Then you'd have to come to some arrangement with the Ministry of Works or Planning Or one of the local authorities—and you know what *they* are But, you're a very fierce young woman, aren't you?

PAULINE Yes And it's time somebody was fierce

KILLIGREW You'll feel better when you've a husband and a baby or two, y'know

PAULINE When I have a baby or two, I'll be *fiercer still*

Enter LADY FARFIELD, who looks rather pale and miserable. She comes down rather cautiously, obviously ready to retreat if CAMYON is about. When she sees he is not, she comes in, watched by the others

LADY FARFIELD (*almost whispering*) Is he—still—up in his room?

SAM Yes, for all Ah know

LADY FARFIELD I was a fool to lose my temper like that And after all this time! Poor Edward! He looked rather sweet too

SAM Well, 'e's stayin' in 'is room—an' I could 'ear 'im tellin' that Squadron-Leader that 'e'd better stay in 'is room too

PAULINE (*angrily*) Then I think he's a mean pig That Squadron-Leader looked heavenly And unless he's completely riveted to somebody else, I'd made up my mind to take possession of him

SAM Yer'll 'ave to look sharp I 'eard Group-Captain shoutin' that they'd leave first thing in t'mornin'—

LADY FARFIELD (*annoyed*) Then I'm not a bit sorry for him Jumping to idiotic conclusions and then refusing to budge I'd like to make him look really silly—

LOTTA (*calling her away from others*) Frances!

LADY FARFIELD (*going to her*) What is it, Lotta?

LOTTA (*confidentially*) I think this is the man you told me about, once—your first love—eh?

LADY FARFIELD (*same tone*) Yes, it is

LOTTA You were in love—but you quarrelled, eh?

LADY FARFIELD Yes And look at him! He's just as hasty and obstinate as ever Worse, in fact

LOTTA But I think you are still in love with him—a little—eh?

LADY FARFIELD (*hastily*) Certainly not

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

LOTTA But you ran away—and cried—

LADY FARFIELD I was upset—naturally—besides, one can't help remembering But now I'm absolutely furious with him I'd like—to make him look completely idiotic (*Hesitates, as if reflecting, and looks now at the others speculatively*) There ought to be something we could do What's happening down here?

SAM Nowt

HILDA We're bored, and Lotta's going on about dresses an' glamour and stuff

LOTTA (*impressively*) I say it is all our fault The men do not care—they are sulky—they are stupid—there is no nice party—why? Because we are not truly feminine any more They come from a war—for years they see nothing but men, men, men, guns, machines, more men, men, men—and what do they see here? We are not mysterious We are not romantic We are not glamorous any more We are— (*with a big, contemptuous gesture, indicating PAULINE*)—like that

PAULINE (*loudly*) All right, but just you try being a romantic and glamorous Land Girl and see where it gets you

LOTTA I understand that perfectly, my dear Pauline, but you need not be a Land Girl to-night

PAULINE I don't want to be, not with that heavenly Squadron-Leader about But what can we do?

LOTTA (*impressively*) Frances, I appeal to you

LADY FARFIELD What do you want *me* to do?

LOTTA You still have some beautiful things So have I—a few old costumes I saved Let us go and make ourselves mysterious and beautiful Even if none of these idiot men ever notice, we will have had some fun

HILDA I'm all for it, though I bet nothing fits me—and then I shan't look beautiful—and not even mysterious

LADY FARFIELD It might be fun And—I have an idea— *She breaks off, and holds up her hand*) Sh! (*They are all still She whispers*) I thought I heard them One of you go and see

HILDA (*quietly*) That's me (*Hurries quietly to stairs and creeps up.*)

LADY FARFIELD (*whispering*) I want them to see us later, but not now If they are coming down, we must hide Unless they are coming to apologise

SAM (*whispering*) I'll bet it's too early for any apologising

LADY FARFIELD Then be ready to hide—behind that door—if I give the signal (*HILDA returns*) Well, Hilda?

HILDA (*whispering*) They're either coming down quietly—or playin' at Red Indians

LADY FARFIELD (*whispering*) Let's hide then Hurry!

They hurry quietly across to door right leaving the door slightly ajar—to show that they are peeping and listening ACTON comes cautiously downstairs He is still in uniform He looks around and then steals to the telephone He glances at a note-book and picks up the phone

ACTON (*at telephone*) Morbury Eight Nine Two

While he is waiting, not looking toward door right, the door opens a little wider Hearing it move, he turns round, but as he turns, the door almost closes again

Wing-Commander Fawcett, please I'm speaking for Group-Captain Camyon Yes

Here, if it holds, he can go through the same business as before with door right

Wing-Commander Fawcett? Squadron-Leader Acton here, sir if you don't mind waiting a moment, sir, I'll get Group-Captain Camyon

Puts down receiver and hurries across to stairs and calls up cautiously

All right, sir Nobody here, and he's on the line

CAMYON now comes down, less cautiously than ACTON, and goes to telephone, with ACTON in attendance

CAMYON (*at telephone*) Fawcett? Camyon here. You were telling me this afternoon that you needed a good-sized country house or two to requisition Well, there's one here Yes, Farfield Hall Occupied by people who don't seem to realise, even now, that we've had a war on our hands for the last few years Yes, that's the type—silly extravagant callous women All right Ring me back in about half an hour

Puts down telephone, and regards ACTON sternly

And now I'm going back to my room—and you're going back to yours, my lad

ACTON Yes, sir

CAMYON No nonsense now This is serious

ACTON Understand absolutely, sir Black show

CAMYON (*sharply*) Come on then

He walks briskly towards the stairs, followed by ACTON As they go, the door right slowly opens As soon as they have gone,

LADY FARFIELD, PAULINE, LOTTA, HILDA, EILEEN, SAM and KILLIGREW come through hastily but quietly.

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

LADY FARFIELD (*who is really angry*) I'm absolutely furious

PAULINE So am I Did you hear him ordering the Squadron-Leader to stay in his room too? Pig!

LADY FARFIELD Well, did you hear what he said about us on the telephone? Silly extravagant callous women!

LOTTA What did I tell you? No glamour, y'see

LADY FARFIELD Now if we could only get him downstairs again at the right moment

SAM I'll bet they'll both be down again soon

KILLIGREW We can always invent a message to bring them down, if necessary

LADY FARFIELD (*who is thinking*) Yes Mr Killigrew, you'll have to help us

KILLIGREW Certainly Only I'd like to do a little telephoning first

LADY FARFIELD There'll be no hurry for you I'll have to find the things first But come up as soon as you've done your telephoning The rest of us must go through the kitchen and up the back stairs And we'll collect Kenton—we'll need him Come along

As they go, all but KILLIGREW.

If Edward Camyon is determined to make a fool of himself again, I'll jolly well see that he does it properly this time Pompous obstinate idiot!

As they go out door left the telephone rings

KILLIGREW (*calling to LADY FARFIELD*) Leave this to me And I'll join you later when I've done my telephoning

He goes to the telephone

Yes, Farfield Hall Who? Oh yes, Commodore Pentworthy—yes, she's here—doing a survey of the house, I believe—or perhaps firing rocket guns from the roof Anyhow, she'll be hard to find Yes, yes, I'll take a message Yes, Yes, I've got that (*Impatiently*) Yes, yes, the message is perfectly simple, young woman Clear the line please.

He waits a moment, glancing at his note-book

I want Cornland Three Four Yes, I'll hang on

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *comes downstairs, closing a large official note-book*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*curtly*) Is Lady Farfield down here?

KILLIGREW No

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Has she gone out?

KILLIGREW No.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Where is she then?

KILLIGREW I've no idea

She makes a "humph!" sound, and so he makes another one, rather louder She stares at him suspiciously

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*importantly*) Well, wherever she is, I want to tell her that it's absurd of her to pretend that she hasn't ample accommodation here Some of the rooms in the East Wing may seem useless by civilian standards—but my girls in the British Ladies Auxiliary Squadron are accustomed to roughing it

KILLIGREW I'll bet they are

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY What?

KILLIGREW A message has just come through for you Your headquarters has sent the car back for you All very urgent

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Urgent Then I ought to have been told at once

KILLIGREW You have been told at once (*Into telephone*) Hello yes Cornland Three Four—

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*going nearer*) I must telephone to my headquarters immediately I must know exactly what has happened This is important official business—

KILLIGREW (*angrily*) Do be quiet, I can't hear what they're saying at the exchange—

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*angrily*) I will *not* be quiet

KILLIGREW (*shouting*) How can I hear what the girl's saying— (*Into telephone*)—no, not you—

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*loudly*) I say this is important official business and I must ask you to let me have the telephone—

KILLIGREW Will you be quiet?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY No, my call is particularly important—really urgent

KILLIGREW (*into telephone*) Oh—all right

He puts down the receiver and the COMMODORE, glaring at him, goes at once to take up the telephone

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*still glaring at KILLIGREW*) Brindlewell Four Five

To KILLIGREW, who is now looking at the drinks, before helping himself

I don't suppose the call you want to make is of any great importance

KILLIGREW Certainly it is I'm trying to get a string quartette together

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*outraged*) You call *that* important—at a time like this?

KILLIGREW (*giving himself a drink*) Most decidedly. A man must have a little order, sense and beauty somewhere in his life these days, and I find 'em in string quartettes.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*indignantly*) I shall complain of your attitude— (*Breaks off to talk into telephone*) Oh—Millicent—what has happened? No, the car hasn't arrived yet, I'm waiting for it now. Now tell me exactly what's happened.

KILLIGREW (*while she is listening*) Going to be long with that telephone?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*at telephone*) Yes, certainly, if necessary this place would do. I've counted more than thirty rooms that could be used at a pinch. No, don't be *absurd*, Millicent. Just a minute. (*Calling across severely to KILLIGREW*) What did you say?

KILLIGREW I said—are you going to be long with that telephone?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY As long as I please. (*At telephone*) Yes, yes, Millicent—everything must be ready. We may have to move at once. Yes, *to-night*. Of course I shall come straight back. When the car is here to take me. Well, give yourself an aspirin.

She puts down the telephone, still glaring at KILLIGREW, who now takes himself and his drink back to the telephone.

KILLIGREW (*at telephone*) Cornland Three Four.

Enter WEBBER from down right, carrying a large book.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Where is Lady Farfield, Major Webber?

WEBBER I haven't seen her around since supper, Commodore. I've been along there looking at this book—some mighty nice pictures of the neighbourhood.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY I'm waiting for my car.

WEBBER Well, join me in a drink while you're waiting, Commodore.

KILLIGREW (*at telephone*) All right, I *am* waiting.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*pointing to the red stuff*) I'll have some of that fruit cup, thank you.

WEBBER (*holding up the jug*) Is this fruit cup?

KILLIGREW (*still at telephone but calling across*) Looks to me like blood and soda. (*Into telephone*) No, I wasn't swearing at you, but I may start in a minute. You just get me Cornland Three Four.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*who has her drink now*) Well—cheers!

WEBBER Here's to us, Commodore!

*She takes a good drink, watched anxiously by the other two
She closes her eyes a moment, in delight or anguish, before returning
manfully to the surface*

How is it, Commodore?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*blinking*) Obviously not made of fresh fruit—that's too much to expect these days—but very refreshing, a jolly good drink I think I'll have a little more, please, Major Webber

WEBBER (*taking her glass*) Sure thing!

KILLIGREW (*into telephone*) Yes, it is Mr Fraser I'm wanting Old Mr Fraser or young Mr Fraser? I don't care

The COMMODORE's second good pull at the drink has not been without its effect

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*sternly*) If you want *my* opinion, I think we're becoming too soft Yes, slack and soft We British are getting too slack and soft You Americans, Major Webber—so far as I can see—are even worse—*pampered!*

KILLIGREW (*calling across from telephone*) You ought to try the Russians

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*with dignity*) I have no wish to try the Russians Or to have anything to do with the Russians I cannot help remembering that many of the Russians are Bolsheviks

WEBBER You've got something there, Commodore

KILLIGREW (*calling across*) What do you expect them to be—members of the Primrose League? (*Into telephone*) Oh, Mr Fraser—my name's Killigrew and I'm staying at Farfield Hall—

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*on top of his remarks into telephone*) In any case, this is not a question that any mere civilian can attempt to discuss with any authority, if only because he lacks the necessary experience—

KILLIGREW (*who is trying to hear on telephone*) Oh—be quiet a minute

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*angrily*) I will *not* be quiet Why should I?

KILLIGREW (*angrily*) Because I'm trying to hear what this chap's saying—and the line's bad (*Into telephone*) Yes, yes now, Mr Fraser, I understand you play the 'cello

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Really—the 'cello—at a time like this!

KILLIGREW (*loudly into telephone*) Oh—your son Well, is he there? All right, I'll wait

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*angrily*) Lord Chipping Norton is

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a member of the government and he also happens to be an old friend of mine I'm inclined to make a serious complaint to him about your extraordinary conduct and attitude, Mr Killigrew

KILLIGREW (*still at telephone, coolly*) Make fifty complaints to Lord Chipping Norton if you like, madam I don't care a fig for Lord Chipping Norton, who, incidentally, is a most inefficient junior minister and not likely to be in the government much longer (*Into telephone*) Hello, hello!

WEBBER (*moving towards door right and laughing*) Say—why didn't somebody tell me about you British? Back home we've never had the right idea about you, and Mrs Webber will never believe me when I tell her

Sound of car outside

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*preparing to go*) That must be my car
WEBBER Well, pleased to have met you, Commodore

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY You may see me again, unless my headquarters staff have been able to cope with this emergency

KILLIGREW (*turning, at telephone*) Quiet, *please* I can't hear a word this chap's saying—

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY I don't think it necessary that you should *Fiddler!*

She marches out main door WEBBER laughs and goes out down right, taking his book and drink with him KILLIGREW is still at telephone

KILLIGREW (*telephone*) I hear you play the 'cello, Mr Fraser That doesn't matter, everybody has to make a start sometime Yes, I've plenty of scores Now what about a viola player and a second fiddle? What's her telephone number? Yes, I'll wait

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *now returns, looking disappointed and cross, followed slowly by CORPORAL HERBERT PACKET, HILDA's brother He is, in fact, a larger male version of her The most noticeable thing about him is an enormous slow grin that lights up his weatherbeaten face*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*sternly*) Are you *sure* the car was not sent for me?

HERBERT (*who is rather bewildered*) Yes, sir

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY. Ma'am.

HERBERT What?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*snapping*) Don't call me *Sir* but *Ma'am*

HERBERT (*with his grin*) Oh—I see—ma'am

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY Well, what about the car?—because I'm expecting one——

HERBERT That car belonged to a farmer who gave me a lift—like——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY But who sent you here, Corporal?

HERBERT Well, nobody sent me—miss—ma'am I come on me own—like (*Does his grin*)

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*irritated*) But have you any right to come here on your own?

KILLIGREW (*from telephone*) Why shouldn't he?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*to KILLIGREW*) This is a service matter Don't interfere (*To HERBERT*) Now then, Corporal

KILLIGREW Just a minute (*Into telephone*) I see—she'll ring me here Farfield Hall, eh? Good man! Splendid, splendid! (*Puts down telephone and looks delighted*) Never picked up a 'cello so quickly And I'm on the track of a viola Don't let anybody say the Civil Service can't work fast

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*impatiently*) Well, Corporal?

HERBERT Well, y'see—er—ma'am—I was brought 'ome on a job—an' got a bit of leaf—like—all sudden, y'see Well, I goes to see my sister an' 'er friend—an' woman where they stop tells me they've come on 'ere—so I get talkin' about it to a farmer in a pub—an' 'e gives me a lift 'ere—I 'ope it's right place—Farfield 'All

KILLIGREW That's right, Farfield Hall

HERBERT (*producing his grin*) Okey dokey!

He grins from one to the other and lounges a bit

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*sharply*) Come, come, Corporal Smarten yourself up I wouldn't allow any of my girls to behave like this Wearing the King's uniform—you must be soldierly—smart and soldierly

HERBERT (*apologetic but easy*) That's right I used to be right smart an' soldierly at beginning, after I'd done me trainin' But I wor at Dunkirk an' dropped a bit of it there—like An' then I went to the desert an' up through Tunis an' Sicily an' into Italy An' what w' one thing an' another, yer get right out o' practice—an' start behavin' natural—you're so busy fighting——

KILLIGREW (*approvingly*) Quite right, Corporal

They exchange grins COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *looks sharply at them both, then moves away*

Can you drink beer?

HERBERT Can a duck swim?

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KILLIGREW (*handing him a glass*) Here you are, then

HERBERT (*taking it*) Thank you very much, sir All the best!
(*Drinks*)

KILLIGREW Is your sister called Hilda?

HERBERT That's right Hilda Packet An' 'er friend's called Eileen

KILLIGREW They're here I'll go up and tell them you've arrived
You wait down here, Corporal

KILLIGREW *goes upstairs* HERBERT *stands with his beer, near the table* COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *looks impatiently at her watch* HERBERT *looks at her drolly* Sound of car, then ring at bell
COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*eagerly*) That must be my car

She goes out, and we hear the front door slam and then the car move off HILDA *now comes hurrying downstairs*

HILDA (*delightedly*) 'Erbert! (*She hurries over to him and kisses him*) Well, well— (*Looking him over*) Same old 'Erbert

HERBERT (*grinning*) Same old 'Ilda'

HILDA 'Ave yer been 'ome to see Mother yet?

HERBERT No, I come 'ere first But don't you tell 'er I did

HILDA She'll be that mad if she knows

HERBERT Well, don't tell 'er then I come 'ere first 'cos it's nearer the depot

HILDA Yes, an' 'cos yer wanted to 'ave a look at yer precious Eileen—I know But why didn't yer tell us you were comin'?

HERBERT 'Cos I didn't know They suddenly brought a dozen of us back—six sergeants an' six corporals—in a bomber—to do some instructin'—and then afore we started they said we could 'ave a week's leaf So yer see, 'Ilda, I went to that Mrs Batsby's where you're billeted—an' she says, "Oh, they've gone out for the evenin'," she says—"to that Lady Farfield's at Farfield 'All," she says—an then she tells me where it is—an' a farmer gives me a lift—an' 'ere I am

HILDA An' I must say, 'Erbert, you're lookin' right well

HERBERT (*grinning*) You're not lookin' so bad yerself, 'Ilda

HILDA I'm all right

HERBERT 'Aven't got a steady chap yet, eh?

HILDA (*sharply*) No, but I've 'ad plenty o' chances, an' you needn't think I 'aven't Course I've gone to dances an' the pictures with one or two now an' again, but that's not the same thing An' if yer really want to know—I'll tell yer something

HERBERT (*as she hesitates*) Well—go on

HILDA (*solemnly*) I'm waitin' a bit afore I get a steady chap

HERBERT What are yer waitin' for?

HILDA I'm waitin' till some o' the real boys get back—the boys who've done the fightin' for us

HERBERT That's right, 'Ilda Them's the real bloody lads We 'ave a sergeant—comes from Newcastle—²—an' 'e saw that little photo I 'ave of you—an' after that 'e kept askin' me about yer, an' askin' to 'ave another look at the photo I'll tell yer about 'im after

HILDA I'll see yer do If 'e's not married or anything

HERBERT No, 'e's not

HILDA You 'aven't got a photo of 'im, 'ave yer?

HERBERT Course I 'aven't I don't carry sergeants' photos round wi' me But 'is name's Jack Philips—an' 'is old man keeps a pub in Newcastle— 'Ere—(*dropping his voice*)—where's Eileen?

HILDA (*dropping her voice too*) She's 'ere Yer'll see 'er in a minute

HERBERT That's the idea

HILDA (*very earnestly*) An' let me tell yer something, 'Erbert Packet Eileen's a bit shy an' gets silly ideas sometimes—like we all do—but she's a grand girl, Eileen is, an' thinks a lot about you More than you're worth

HERBERT Well, I think a lot about 'er too Though it's funny never 'aving really seen 'er—like An' yet feelin' I know 'er right well—better than anybody in a way—like—

HILDA Don't kid yerself Letters aren't people Yer've got to be with 'em—an' look at 'em—an' listen to 'em—an' see 'ow they behave—before you really know 'em But Eileen's all right, I can tell you

HERBERT Well, you ought to know, 'Ilda

HILDA I should think I ought When a girl works with another girl, an' then shares a room in a billet, there isn't much that girl doesn' know about the other one, I can tell yer My word, if it were some of 'em, I could make your 'air stand on end If chaps only knew! But Eileen's different An' you be nice to 'er or yer'll 'ear something from me An' don't stay too long down 'ere

HERBERT What for?

HILDA 'Cos we're 'aving a bit o' fun—dressin' up an' pretendin' we're all grand or something (*Breaks off and whispers*) This is Eileen

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EILEEN *comes slowly and shyly downstairs* The other two watch her

HILDA *(slowly, impressively)* Eileen, this is 'Erbert

EILEEN *(slowly advancing)* Hello'

HERBERT *(with his grin)* Hello'

HILDA *(looking drolly from one to the other)* Well, this is where I get out But don't just stare at each other Get it over An' don't be too long about it neither

She goes upstairs The other two, painfully shy, do not even look at each other for a moment The scene that follows must be played with great delicacy and restraint, with no broadening for easy laughs

EILEEN *(slowly)* You didn't say you were coming on leave

HERBERT No, I didn't know I said I might be sent 'ome to do some instructin'—remember?

EILEEN Yes, I remember you said that I was—hoping—you might be

HERBERT An' then—it come quite sudden—same as everything does in the army—like I told you

EILEEN Yes Nothing happens an' then suddenly a lot happens all at once, eh?

HERBERT *(with his grin)* That's right—Eileen

EILEEN *(after a pause)* I expect it seems all different—here at home—doesn't it?

HERBERT No—not so very different—and any'ow it's 'ome—an' that's all right

EILEEN *(slowly, softly)* I expect—I look different to what you thought I'd look—don't I?

HERBERT *(cautiously looking)* No, yer don't I think yer look just like your photo—yer know, that one yer sent

EILEEN Yes But after, I thought I oughtn't to have sent it It wasn't very good of me

HERBERT No, yer look just like it Only——

EILEEN *(anxiously)* Only what?

HERBERT Only—yer a bit taller than I thought—like——

EILEEN Oh—does that matter?

HERBERT No, of course it doesn't Besides—I think—well, you look a lot prettier—like——

EILEEN *(delighted)* Oh Herbert—do I?

HERBERT Yes, yer do *(Pause)* Eileen

EILEEN Yes, Herbert?

HERBERT (*slowly*) Did yer mean all them things yer said in your letters?

EILEEN (*softly*) Yes, I did

HERBERT Do you still—I mean—like—now that you've seen me an' I'm 'ere an' not out there——?

EILEEN (*looking at him*) I do, Herbert—if you do

HERBERT Yes, I do I mean, I'd like us to get married—an'——

EILEEN And have a home of our own

HERBERT Yes, a 'ome of our own I've thought a lot about that, Eileen

EILEEN So have I Wouldn't it be wonderful?

HERBERT Yes But I don't know when that'll be

EILEEN No, but we've waited so long, we can wait a bit longer

HERBERT (*dubiously*) Yes Some of our chaps say they'll make it all right for us—like—yer know, there'll be 'omes an' jobs But a lot o' the chaps say it'll be just like last time—that when we've done the fightin' an' there's no more danger—then we can go an' whistle——

EILEEN (*roused*) That's what happened to my Dad But it won't be like last time

HERBERT 'Ow d'yer know?

EILEEN (*with sudden fierceness*) Because we won't let it be, that's why This is our country, isn't it? You've gone and fought for it And I've left home and worked for it We've given years out of our life to keep it safe, haven't we? All right then You want a steady job, and I want a home of my own And we're going to get 'em, and nobody's going to stop us this time

With abrupt change of mood and tone, hesitantly

Herbert—now that you've seen me—do you think—it'll be all right?

HERBERT 'Ow d'yer mean—all right?

EILEEN Do you think—you could love me?

HERBERT (*ashamed of this*) Well—yes, I do, Eileen

EILEEN (*with relief*) Then that's all that matters

She looks at him, smiling, and he takes a step towards her, and is clearly about to take her in his arms and kiss her, when MAJOR WEBBER enters down right

WEBBER Well, well, well! Hello, another visitor, eh?

EILEEN Yes, this is Hilda's brother, Herbert He's—my young man

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WEBBER (*heartily*) Say, that's fine We must have a drink on this

HILDA *hurries downstairs, putting her head round*

HILDA (*hurriedly calling*) Come, you two, you're wanted upstairs—quick Yes, both of you

WEBBER (*puzzled*) What's going on around here?

HILDA (*cheerfully*) You stay there—and you'll see And when it happens, just keep quiet Come on, you two, 'urry up (*She looks upstairs*) Oh—there's somebody coming We'll go round the other way

She hurries downstairs and bustles them off with her through kitchen WEBBER stares after them, then gives himself a drink After a moment, TONY ACTON comes cautiously downstairs He is now dressed in a sports coat and flannel trousers He looks about him carefully, sees WEBBER with the glass in his hand, and cautiously comes down

WEBBER (*cordially*) Hello! Come right in

TONY Thanks

WEBBER My name's Webber—George Webber

TONY Mine's Acton

WEBBER Have some Scotch?

TONY No, thanks But I wouldn't mind some beer if there's any going

WEBBER Why not? Help yourself

TONY Thanks (*Takes some beer*) I'm not supposed to be down here—but—er—I ran out of matches—

WEBBER I can let you have some matches Don't need 'em Got a good lighter (*Throws some matches on the table*)

TONY Thanks Cheers! (*Drinks*)

WEBBER Cheers! (*Drinks, then regards TONY curiously while latter is lighting a cigarette*) Mr Acton, did you say you're not supposed to be down here?

TONY Yes

WEBBER You mean—downstairs here—where we are?

TONY (*smiling*) That's it Here

WEBBER (*rather puzzled*) Well, I'm sorry to hear that, Mr Acton

TONY Don't bother about it, Major It's of no importance at all

WEBBER You're staying here, I guess

TONY Well, I'm staying here the rest of to-night—with luck You live here?

WEBBER Just arrived this evening

TONY Did you? So did I (*Looks about him, then more confidentially*) Rum show, isn't it?

WEBBER Now that's very interesting to me, Mr Acton Because I said to myself, "George Webber, you're just being plain stoopid"

TONY Oh—why did you say that to yourself?

WEBBER Well, because I couldn't get the hang of things around here First I thought this, and then I thought that But I reckon that right now I'm getting things under control—yes, *sir*

TONY I wish I could say the same

WEBBER You from the factory, Mr Acton?

TONY What factory?

WEBBER Why, the aircraft factory where Lady Farfield and these girls work

TONY (*astonished*) Lady Farfield — you mean — this woman here——?

WEBBER She's the only one around here, isn't she?

TONY I wouldn't know, old boy, I really wouldn't know I haven't anything under control to-night If it's the one I mean, I suppose she goes over there occasionally and cuts the cake or presents the prizes—eh?

WEBBER No, *sir* She worked a long time at the bench, and now she's a charge-hand The other folks she's asked in work with her—including the foreman.

TONY (*with extreme scepticism*) You wouldn't be pulling my leg by any chance, would you? I think not Oh no All right, we've had that Now ask me what I'm doing

WEBBER (*rather surprised*) Just what I was wondering That's why I asked if you were from the factory

TONY (*smoothly and confidentially*) The answer is No There's no real money in this war work, old boy I'm in the Black Market Doing a nice big deal at the moment in clothes coupons

WEBBER (*unpleasantly surprised*) Clothes coupons?

TONY That's the idea Not forged, y'know Oh—no, quite genuine Of course I wouldn't like to say how the fella managed to lay his hands on quarter of a million——

WEBBER (*same tone*) Quarter of a million!

TONY (*confidentially*) And a few over, old boy, quite a few over. But they're outside the deal The little woman wants a few new outfits—you know how they are

He winks at WEBBER, who stares at him aghast While they are staring at each other, CAMYON, still in uniform, comes very

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cautiously downstairs When he sees only ACTON and WEBBER, he looks relieved, but when ACTON sees him, ACTON looks embarrassed

CAMYON (*rather gruffly*) What are you doing down here?

TONY (*apologetically*) Had to come down, sir Hadn't any matches

CAMYON Hm I looked into your room—so had to come down to see what you were up to

TONY Quite so, sir Er—this is Major Webber—Group-Captain Camyon

CAMYON How d'you do?

WEBBER Pleased to meet you, Group-Captain You look as if you've come from overseas

CAMYON I have Only got back yesterday After four years

WEBBER Fine! There must be quite a lot you can tell us that I'd be very glad to know, Group-Captain Have some Scotch?

CAMYON No thanks

WEBBER It's good Scotch I was darned lucky to get it

CAMYON Oh—it's yours, is it?

WEBBER Yes, sir

CAMYON Oh—then I'll change my mind—thanks—and have some I thought it probably belonged to—er—the house

As WEBBER pours out the whisky, TONY, who is obviously uncomfortable, strolls with assumed nonchalance away from the table, examining the animals' heads, etc WEBBER sees this as an opportunity to have a private word with CAMYON about him

CAMYON (*receiving whisky*) Thanks I could do with this Good luck! (*Drinks*)

WEBBER (*very confidentially*) Group-Captain, you seem to know that young man

CAMYON Yes I do Why?

WEBBER (*carefully*) Well—I'm nothing but a stranger around here, and we've been warned not to interfere—but I feel it's my dooty to tell you that that young man says he's operating the Black Market

CAMYON (*astonished*) The Black Market!

WEBBER (*gravely*) Yes, sir Illegal trading in clothes coupons—hundreds of thousands of 'em Boasts of it—

CAMYON Nonsense! He's my Squadron-Leader, who came back with me (*Calling sharply*) Acton

TONY (*turning and advancing*) Sir!

CAMYON What the blazes do you mean by talking nonsense about the Black Market to this officer?

TONY (*embarrassed*) Well—sir—we were just chatting—

WEBBER (*amused*) And you were just joshing me, eh? Well, I ought to have known. Okay, Squadron-Leader, don't apologise.

CAMYON It won't do, though. To begin with, it's bad manners—and it might be dangerous. What's the idea?

TONY (*apologetically*) I'm sorry, sir—but, you see, he began pulling my leg, so I thought I'd better not be too stand-offish—I know how the Americans like a bit of leg-pulling—so I pulled his.

WEBBER (*heartily*) That's all right with me, Squadron-Leader. But—say—I didn't do any leg-pulling. I was only telling you about the folks here.

TONY I know. And didn't you tell me that Lady Farfield was entertaining a few girl chums from the aircraft factory, where she's just been made a charge-hand?

WEBBER (*firmly*) I certainly did.

CAMYON Oh well, then you did start it, Major, and you can hardly blame him. I might have done the same myself. After all, we British have to prove we have some sense of humour.

TONY Just what I thought, sir. Couldn't let the old side down, I thought. Had to do something.

CAMYON Quite. Mind you, Major Webber, this doesn't mean I'm defending these people here. They'd no business to amuse themselves filling you up with all that stuff about being factory hands when in fact they're keeping a houseful of servants and throwing great idiotic parties. I could hear 'em upstairs giggling and running up and down the corridors and screaming their silly heads off.

TONY So could I, sir. Black show, I thought.

CAMYON Couldn't be worse. (*To WEBBER, who is gaping at them*) But don't imagine everybody's like this over here. You just happen to have struck a bad patch, I imagine, that's all. So have we. It happens not to seem particularly funny to me—for a special reason—

TONY (*seriously*) She slapped his face, you know. I hope you don't mind my mentioning it, sir.

CAMYON Yes, of course I do, you ass.

WEBBER (*bewildered*) Who slapped your face?

CAMYON Lady Farfield. She happens to be — er — an old friend—

WEBBER (*cutting in, urgently*) Now wait a minute. Let's try and

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straighten this out I guess that old butler showed you in, didn't he?

TONY He did

WEBBER And you listened to him, didn't you?

CAMYON We couldn't help it

WEBBER (*firmly*) Well, so did I! And I found out afterwards it was a lot of hooey—yes, *sir*,

CAMYON Hooey!

WEBBER (*triumphantly*) Nothing else but The old man's really talking about the past He's so old he keeps forgetting

CAMYON *exchanges a startled glance with TONY*

I was here at supper There are two of us—a Civil Servant and myself—who are billeted here—and then there are a few folks from the factory—a foreman and a couple of factory girls——

TONY Hoy, you're not starting that all over again, are you?

WEBBER (*earnestly*) But it's true I assure you I never was more serious in my life

CAMYON (*slowly*) I don't know what to make of this

TONY Don't want to butt in, *sir*, but did you notice that little Land Girl on the stairs when we first came in? Very serious type, I thought, and didn't seem to fit in with our notion of the place at all Been on my mind, that girl Perhaps we've been all wrong, *sir*

WEBBER Sure you have And our hostess has been doing a swell job Given up her old privileges No class distinctions Democracy with its sleeves rolled up

CAMYON My God, Tony, if we have been wrong, we've made precious idiots of ourselves Or at least, *I* have

WEBBER Don't worry We'll all be having a good laugh over it soon

Sound of women's voices—light laughter and chatter—can now be heard from upstairs

TONY Listen! They're coming down

WEBBER (*beaming*) Now you'll see Just a little bunch of factory folks Foreman Kids from the factory in their old clothes Fighting democracy You'll see And get your apology ready—you're going to need it

They look expectantly towards stairs There arrives, very impressively, the following procession first, old KENTON, who is wearing a scarlet coat, and is carrying a large branched candlestick Then follow, in close order, LADY FRANCES, LOTTA, PAULINE, (who wears a full loose dress), EILEEN and HILDA, and they are

all wearing dresses—one or two modern, others period—that enhance their respective personalities, and they all look very feminine, romantic, glamorous, and give the impression of being haughtily conscious of this Behind them comes KILLIGREW, carrying his violin, and wearing full evening dress, the jacket of which is too tight for him Behind him come SAM and HERBERT, who have been rigged up fancifully and rather sketchily but still impressively as footmen, and carry tray with glasses and a bottle of champagne, etc The procession moves in slowly, ignoring the men, until the women are grouped round the piano

WEBBER (*bowled over*) Boy—oh boy!

TONY (*also bowled over*) Crrr-ikey!

CAMYON (*to WEBBER, with furious irony*) Just a little bunch of homely folks! Kids from the factory in their old clothes! Democracy in its shirt-sleeves winning the war!

WEBBER (*earnestly*) I assure you, Grou—

CAMYON (*through his teeth*) Oh—stop acting the goat!

LADY FARFIELD (*across from piano, where ladies are*) Edward—I beg your pardon—Group-Captain Camyon—

CAMYON (*curtly from fireplace*) Well?

LADY FARFIELD (*with touch of mockery*) As the very sight of us seems to annoy you so much—and the music may annoy you still more—there's no need for you to stay down here, you know You have my permission to return to your room

CAMYON (*curtly*) Thank you, Frances—I beg your pardon, Lady Farfield—but if you've no strong objection—I prefer to stay here I'm expecting an important telephone call

LADY FARFIELD About requisitioning a house, perhaps?

CAMYON Yes But don't let me interrupt your—er—music

LADY FARFIELD (*smiling and playing*) We don't propose to

They begin singing a Viennese light opera song, just a short snatch of it During this, PAULINE can come nearer to TONY and smile at him, and finding her irresistible he moves towards her, only to be called back by a stern look and a warning "Acton!" from his chief at the fireplace As the singing ends

LADY FARFIELD (*still idly playing*) Kenton, the champagne

KENTON Yes, me lady

He begins serving the champagne, as the music drifts dreamily on.

CAMYON (*with angry irony to WEBBER*) Just a few little factory girls straight from the benches!

WEBBER. Certainly looks a swell bunch—yes, sir Surprised me

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

Always had a notion your British women didn't care how they looked——

CAMYON (*almost bursting with fury*) Dammit, sir—will you—kindly—drop it (*Turns away*)

TONY (*to WEBBER, whispering*) Turn it up, old boy Or Groupie'll go up in flames

WEBBER But I tell you—

TONY (*reproachfully*) No, no, old boy We bought it Wizard girl there, though

KENTON (*approaching them*) Champagne, sir?

WEBBER (*taking one*) You bet! Thanks

KENTON (*to TONY*) And you, sir?

TONY (*taking one, promptly*) Certainly

CAMYON (*turning, sternly*) Leave that stuff alone, Acton

TONY Certainly, sir (*To KENTON, severely, returning glass*) Certainly not

KENTON (*to CAMYON*) Champagne, sir?

CAMYON (*grimly*) Yes (*He takes the glass and flings the contents impressively on the floor A cry from the girls*) Now what do you think of that?

KENTON (*sturdily*) Not much, sir This is the very last bottle in my cellar, and probably the last I'll ever see No, sir, I don't think much of that

LADY FARFIELD (*standing up from piano*) All right, Kenton, thank you We shan't need you any more

KENTON Thank you, me lady

He goes off down left

LADY FARFIELD (*calling across to CAMYON*) That was unpardonable

CAMYON (*stiffly*) It was I'll apologise to your butler if I see him again After all, one can't blame an old servant for the faults of his employer

LADY FARFIELD (*with irony*) Very considerate of you!

They now play and sing again, preferably something light, charming, mocking As the music dies down——

LADY FARFIELD Herbert—cigarettes for the gentlemen

The embarrassed and grinning HERBERT comes down with a small tray with twenty cigarettes on it

HERBERT Er—cigarettes?

CAMYON (*sternly*) Come here And take the grin off your face

HERBERT Yes, sir

CAMYON (*indignantly*) A great healthy chap like you playing the flunkey at a time like this! What have *you* been doing the last few years? Handing round cigarettes and folding table napkins?

HERBERT (*equally indignant*) Me? I've just come back from the Eighth Army 'Ere, I've 'ad enough o' this

He puts down the little tray and hurries across to the stairs, but turns as he reaches them

But don't forget them's my twenty Players (*He goes upstairs*)

CAMYON (*to TONY and WEBBER*) Eighth Army! Twenty Players! What is this?

LADY FARFIELD (*mockingly*) Just a little musical evening Come on girls

ACTON starts to dance with PAULINE, CAMYON turns and sees him LADY FARFIELD *plays and all sing, applause*

CAMYON Acton!

ACTON leaves PAULINE WEBBER rises and dances with her

KILLIGREW (*who has been tuning his fiddle*) Quiet, please!

LADY FARFIELD Now for some real music (*With air of hostess with treat*) Madame Lotta Schulberg, the famous soubrette of the Vienna Volksopera has very kindly consented to sing to us

Some applause

WEBBER (*whispering to CAMYON*) She's the cook really

CAMYON (*with fierce irony*) And you're the Fairy Queen

WEBBER (*earnestly*) Now—no kidding—I—

CAMYON (*cutting in roughly*) Oh—for God's sake—drop it

LADY FARFIELD at the piano with KILLIGREW behind her with his violin, the three girls picturesquely grouped round and LOTTA in front She sings a number from light opera As she finishes the telephone rings

TONY Shall I answer it, sir? (*Moves towards the phone*)

LADY FARFIELD (*rises*) Please do

KILLIGREW (*to LADY FARFIELD*) My G string's gone Have another somewhere upstairs but it may take some finding So—

He smilingly waves a hand, as if in farewell, as he goes to staircase Then turns there and calls across to LOTTA

Any chance of early tea in the morning?

LOTTA (*firmly*) No chance at all

KILLIGREW It's about eighteen months^{*} since I had any early

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

morning tea (*Smiling across at CAMYON*) You've probably had gallons—um?

CAMYON (*angrily*) I never touch the stuff

As KILLIGREW vanishes, the telephone rings again

EILEEN We ought to go upstairs and change Come on, Hilda

LOTTA I will go with you—and put these dresses away

HILDA (*as they go to stairs, turning to CAMYON*) But one day factory girls'll look like queens—and don't you try to stop it

CAMYON Who said I wanted to stop it!

HILDA, EILEEN, LOTTA go upstairs The telephone rings again

LADY FARFIELD (*in large clear tone*) Come along, Pauline, we'll go along to the drawing-room—and let Group-Captain Camyon take his call

CAMYON (*ironically*) Thank you!

LADY FARFIELD (*looking at him from near door*) But be careful now, Edward Or I swear I'll never speak to you again

She sweeps out, with PAULINE Telephone rings again WEBBER, who has been holding door open for LADY FARFIELD, shuts it and comes in He, SAM, TONY watch CAMYON, who after some hesitation goes to telephone

CAMYON (*at telephone*) Yes, Group-Captain Camyon here What? Who d'you want to talk to? What? Here Wait—Gone (*To the others*) Some nonsense about a farmer and some fiddles What is this—a madhouse?

WEBBER (*roaring with laughter*) That'll be Killigrew and his string quartettes Well, well, well!

CAMYON (*bewildered*) Who's Killigrew—this fiddler chap here?

WEBBER (*still laughing*) Yes One of your prominent Civil Servants Ministry of Reconstruction

CAMYON Now are you starting all over again—?

WEBBER (*still laughing*) But I've told you the exact truth the whole time (*To SAM, who has now taken off his footman's coat, and is lighting his pipe*) Sam—you'd better tell him

SAM Now tak' it easy, Group-Captain Camyon This is no madder nor most 'ouses We're all bit barmy these days any'ow,

WEBBER (*laughing*) I'll say we are

TONY (*to WEBBER*) That's all right, old boy, but you're not carrying the can Let's get all this buttoned up.

CAMYON Now wait'a minute What kind of a footman are you?

ACT II HOW ARE THEY AT HOME ?

SAM No kind Don't be daft Ah'm foreman at factory where we make the new Prestons

CAMYON The new Prestons! I was coming over to your place

SAM Ah know, Ah know An' me an' you's met before

CAMYON (*staring at him*) So we have I thought I'd seen you somewhere—

SAM About twelve year since, an' you wor a Squadron-Leader then an' yer come to t'old Kestrel Five factory Sam Cawthra

CAMYON Sam Cawthra—yes, I remember But what on earth are you doing here?

SAM Oh we're 'avin' a little party—so we 'ad a bit o' fun wi' yer—

CAMYON Bit of fun! Now look here, Sam, let's get this straight Have Lady Farfield and those girls really been working with you?

SAM Ay, an' good workers an' all Charge-'and now, Lady Farfield is

CAMYON But they looked—

SAM (*cutting in*) They looked as if they'd gone upstairs an' put some fancy clothes on That's all And—damn it—yer can't expect 'em to wear mucky overalls an' corduroy pants all the time

TONY Sir, we've bought it

CAMYON My God—I've made an ass of myself

SAM Well, yer not first an' yer won't be t'last

CAMYON No, but this is serious (*Turning to WEBBER*) I'm sorry, Major Webber

WEBBER Think nothing of it Enjoyed every minute of it Why, I haven't laughed so much in years— (*Looks as if he's about to start laughing again*)

TONY Easy, old boy We've had it now

PAULINE *enters from drawing-room*

PAULINE (*calmly*) Sorry to intrude But I'm thirsty

As she goes to drinks, TONY and WEBBER go too

TONY Of course Good scheme! What'll you have?

SAM (*taking CAMYON downstage*) No, don't worry, there's no real 'arm done

CAMYON (*quietly but urgently*) No, but you see, we quarrelled before the war—and I was in the right then, and she knew it but wouldn't admit it And now that she's put me nicely in the wrong, she's never going to look at me again

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

SAM Ah can see yer know nowt about women It's just when yer in the right that they can't forgive yer Now that yer in the wrong, all yer 'ave to do is just to say 'ow sorry you are an' what a lot yer think about 'er—an' Bob's yer uncle (*Moving him towards door down right*) An' this is yer chance

CAMYON (*hesitates a second, then bracing*) Thanks, Sam I'll try

SAM *makes for the stairs*

SAM We'll 'ave to be settin' off 'ome soon Well, go on Up the Air Force!

He goes upstairs, leaving PAULINE and TONY obviously wishing to be rid of WEBBER

WEBBER (*obviously beginning to settle down*) Well, well! Turned out quite a party after all Yes, sir!

PAULINE (*gravely regarding him*) Major Webber You're looking very, very tired now You really are

WEBBER (*concerned*) Is that so?

PAULINE (*gravely*) Yes, it is I think you ought to go to bed—and never mind about us

TONY Good scheme! You look all in, sir Probably had a long day

WEBBER Well, I have had quite a long confused kinda day May take me some time, I guess, to get the hang of things in this little neck of the woods

PAULINE Major Webber, I think you're very sweet

WEBBER (*smiling*) Well, that's fine You're a pretty cute trick yourself, Miss Pauline And I'll turn in, I guess Good night

TONY and PAULINE Good night

WEBBER (*turning on stairs*) I'll get around to it in time

He goes upstairs

TONY Mind you, I know how he feels

PAULINE Why do you?

TONY Well, what with last night—

PAULINE (*sternly*) Were you *drinking*?

TONY Well—we had a can or two

PAULINE Any girls?

TONY No—no—chaps—just chaps

PAULINE Well, pull yourself together, because I want to talk to you seriously You're not, I hope, the type of officer who is looking forward to nothing after the war but the secretaryship of a second-rate golf club in a decaying society—are you?

TONY Good lord—no Hate golf And I'm full of plans and ambition and all that—you'd be surprised

PAULINE That's settled then We can talk about your plans afterwards In the meantime I shall call you Tony and you can call me Pauline

TONY (*sincerely*) Thanks very much, Pauline

KENTON (*entering from kitchen*) Beg pardon, miss But is her ladyship in the drawing-room?

PAULINE She is, and you mustn't disturb her There isn't anything more for you to do Just go straight upstairs to your little room and have one of your interesting dreams

KENTON Thank you, miss I 'ad one last night, miss I dreamt I took my old aunt, who used to keep the draper's, to the races at Goodwood

PAULINE Well, to-night you try and get her into the Royal Enclosure at Ascot

KENTON (*with a sudden smile—the first*) Thank you, miss And—good luck!

He goes back into kitchen

PAULINE (*cool and clear*) Well, Tony, I've decided to take a deep personal interest in you

TONY Wizard! Absolutely wizard!

PAULINE But first, I want to know why you keep staring at me in a puzzled rather than a fascinated manner

TONY Well—look here—you *are* the little Land Girl I saw when I first came in, aren't you?

PAULINE Why? Does it matter?

TONY It does rather She completely bowled me over

PAULINE (*indignantly*) So much for glamour Look!

She begins hastily pulling off her dress

TONY (*in alarm*) Hoy! Steady! Whoa!

PAULINE *now shows herself in her Land Girl's uniform She smoothes her hair back to what it was before*

PAULINE (*holding dress over her arm*) Well, here you are, idiot Specimen of the Women's Land Army—Second World War

TONY (*lost in admiration*) What a girl! You've got everything

While they gaze at each other, CAMYON and LADY FARFIELD enter from drawing-room

PAULINE (*hastily*) I must take this dress upstairs You can come with me, if you like

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

They begin to move towards the stairs

CAMYON (*with mock severity*) Where are you going, Acton?

PAULINE (*coolly*) I've asked Squadron-Leader Acton to go with me as I'm very nervous at night

LADY FARFIELD (*laughingly*) Pauline!

TONY That's right, sir Nervous type

CAMYON (*grinning*) Go on (*As the two youngsters hurry off, he turns to LADY FARFIELD*) And another thing, Frances, I had a splitting bad headache

LADY FARFIELD (*coldly*) Well, you shouldn't drink too much

CAMYON I haven't been drinking too much You see, I got rather a nasty little crack on the head a few months ago and though it's healed now, it troubles me at times, and especially after travelling

LADY FARFIELD (*concerned*) Oh—Edward, why didn't you tell me?

CAMYON Hadn't a chance to (*Moves towards her*) But never mind that What I really wanted to say was—not only was I wrong to-night, for which I apologise all over again, but also I was badly wrong before the war I'm sorry

LADY FARFIELD I'm not so sure you were

CAMYON Oh yes, I was And please say you forgive me And don't forget I've already paid heavily for my stupidity

LADY FARFIELD How?

CAMYON By having lost you for all this time And to-night—when I saw you—at last—you took my breath away

LADY FARFIELD I certainly took your breath away—slapping you like that And probably now that I'm a manual worker I don't know my own strength I'm sorry, Edward

CAMYON I asked for it But please remember, Frances, I've been away overseas for four years, working with men who are wondering all the time about their womenfolk

LADY FARFIELD (*gravely*) You tell them that we women at home work for them, pray for them, and think of nothing else, deep down, but the time when it'll be over and they're all back And that's our real life

CAMYON (*slowly*) I suppose I've no right even to ask, now But—are you waiting for somebody like that?

LADY FARFIELD (*half-smiling*) No, Edward—not now.

CAMYON (*about to embrace her*) Frances—darling!

LADY FARFIELD Darling!

Sound of factory party and HERBERT coming downstairs

LADY FARFIELD Oh damn! They're all coming down But Edward, there's something I want to hear you say to other people before you talk to me

As HILDA, EILEEN, SAM and HERBERT come down

I suppose you ought to go really, but it seems a pity

HILDA Yes, it does 'Ere, we've got our bikes, but what about 'Erbert?

EILEEN I've fixed up to borrow one for him here

HILDA (to HERBERT) You see—got somebody to look after you now

SAM (to LADY FARFIELD) Well, thank you very much Ah've 'ad a good evening, Ah don't know about t'others

EILEEN (*shy and happy*) We all have Haven't we, Herbert?

HERBERT (*grinning*) That's right Except for that footman business

CAMYON Sorry about that, Corporal

HERBERT No 'arm done, sir And—er—Lady Farfield, I wish you'd keep them twenty Players—like—just for what you've given me to-night—

LADY FARFIELD (*surprised*) But I haven't given you anything, have I?

HERBERT (*indicating EILEEN*) Well—look what I've got

EILEEN (*confused but radiant*) Oh—'Erbert!

CAMYON Quite right, Corporal Ladies, I seem to have misjudged you all I'm sorry But you shouldn't have looked so gorgeous

HILDA (to LADY FARFIELD) There! You see, he's nice really

SAM, Come on

CAMYON Good night, Sam, see you at the factory in the morning

Chorus of good-byes, thank you's, etc., as they all go up to main door Enter LOTTA right

LADY FARFIELD And are you nice really, Edward? (To LOTTA) You need not sit up, Lotta.

LOTTA (*picks up tray*) I know I go to the kitchen to make some porridge Always I forget the porridge Good night (*Exit LOTTA*)

LADY FARFIELD (*moving to settee*) And now that we've got this place to ourselves at last, let's be quiet and peaceful

CAMYON (*sitting beside her*) I'm all for it, Frances I've had quite a day

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

LADY FARFIELD So have I, darling So let's make the best of it
Just relax and be quiet

CAMYON Enjoy our bit of luck You know, I'm not bad-tempered
really A peaceful quiet chap when I'm allowed to be

LADY FARFIELD Perhaps we're all peaceful quiet chaps when we're
allowed to be, darling (*There is a loud ringing at the front door*)
Oh—my goodness!

*Before they can move, door bursts open and three people carrying
instruments and scores burst in An elderly man with a beard, a
stout middle-aged woman and a queer-looking young girl*

ELDERLY MAN (*loud rural voice*) Evening, all! This is it, isn't it?
Farfield Hall Mr Killi—summat or other—asked for us to come
Onny time, he said, an' sooner the better, I thought So we are here,
though I don't know what use young Lucy'll be—

KILLIGREW, *armed with his fiddle and scores, dashes downstairs,
while the others stare, amazed*

KILLIGREW (*in tremendous form*) Hello, hello, hello! Happened to
have my head out of the window and saw you arriving in your gig
or trap or whatever it is Delighted to see you—Mr er— (*con-
sults his note-book*) Mr Bramley—

ELDERLY MAN No

KILLIGREW No, of course not Mr —er—Fraser—

ELDERLY MAN No

KILLIGREW I mean, Mr Henniman—

ELDERLY MAN No

KILLIGREW Never mind Delighted to see you (*Indicating girl*)
Looks a bit young for the Mozart—but we'll manage—

*There is now a tremendous sound of lorries arriving, female voices
shouting, etc*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *bursts in, with uniformed girls behind
her, carrying files, etc*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*in loud official tone*) I'm billeting the
whole of my headquarters here There's nowhere else—and I warned
you, Frances

LADY FARFIELD (*protesting loudly*) Phylis, you can't all descend
on us like this

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*ignoring them, in commanding tones*)
All right, Millicent, unload as quickly as possible Straight up the
stairs, girls Office files and equipment before personal luggage Come
along, girls, sharp now—tell the lorries to clear the doorway as soon
as possible—

ACT II HOW ARE THEY AT HOME ?

As she goes on giving loud orders, LADY FARFIELD and LOTTA keep on protesting, PAULINE bursts into a scream of laughter, in which TONY joins, while CAMYON joins LADY FARFIELD in protesting The din outside gets louder The orchestra plays a gay mocking tune, and the curtain falls

END OF PLAY

EVER SINCE PARADISE

*A Discursive Entertainment,
chiefly referring to Love and
Marriage, in Three Acts*

CHARACTERS

The Musicians

PHILIP

JOYCE

The Commentators

WILLIAM •

HELEN

The Example

PAUL

ROSEMARY



The Action is in many different places, and the time is the Present,
but between Wars

Ever Since Paradise—Copyright, 1946, by John Boynton Priestley

*First produced at the New Theatre, London, on June 4th, 1947, with
the following cast*

PHILIP
JOYCE
WILLIAM
HELEN
ROSEMARY
PAUL

DENNIS ARUNDELL
JANE CARR
ROGER LIVESEY
URSULA JEANS
JOY SHELTON
HUGH KELLY

ACT I

The main curtain may or may not be used, according to the size of the stage. On each side of the stage, as far apart as possible, is a grand piano, each exactly alike, with the keyboard downstage, at an angle of about sixty degrees to the footlights. Near each piano, a little farther upstage, is a chair for each commentator. These are backed by dark curtaining, hiding the stage behind, and there is an entrance through this curtaining at each side, used only by WILLIAM and HELEN. Set a little farther back, occupying all the centre of the stage, with a small proscenium formed by a continuation of the curtaining behind the platforms, is a separate little stage, which may or may not be raised on a small rostrum, and is eight or nine feet deep. This inner stage has its own curtain in front, about nine feet high, and it is essential that this can be pulled up or drawn along very easily, apparently at a touch. At the opening this curtain is down, and the inner stage cannot be seen.

House lights go down and both pianos are lit. PHILIP and JOYCE, two youngish people in simple evening dress (PHILIP in dinner jacket) are seated at the pianos. PHILIP at the right and JOYCE at the left. They begin playing the overture, which goes along splendidly for two or three minutes, both keeping perfect time. Then they begin to sound ragged and look worried. He wants to increase the tempo and she is lagging behind. Finally, with a discordant crash, they stop, glaring at each other.

PHILIP (*rising angrily*) There you are, you see!

JOYCE (*rising angrily*) It's not my fault.

PHILIP Of course it is.

JOYCE No it isn't, it's your fault.

PHILIP No it isn't, you were dragging it again.

JOYCE I wasn't. You were racing away at a ridiculous pace.

PHILIP I wasn't.

JOYCE You were. Always the same! Want to rush everything.

PHILIP I don't want to rush everything.

JOYCE Yes, you do. Going and taking that cottage!

PHILIP (*very angrily*) What's my taking that cottage got to do with your dragging the time again—?

Enter WILLIAM in dinner jacket.

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

WILLIAM (*reproachfully*) I say, I say, this won't do, you know You two ought to be playing, not shouting at each other (*To audience*) I'm so sorry about this Do excuse us, please! (*To the pianists*) You were playing so well too I was just remarking to Helen how well you were playing—and then—no more music but another quarrel

JOYCE It's his fault He began to rush it again

WILLIAM Now, Philip, you mustn't rush it—

PHILIP I wasn't She *will* drag it

WILLIAM Now, Joyce, you really mustn't drag it—

JOYCE I never do That's just his stupidity

PHILIP (*rising angrily*) It isn't It's your—

WILLIAM (*very forcefully*) Stop it, stop it, stop it! Now if one of you would condescend to rush a little less

PHILIP and JOYCE *both sit at their pianos*
then no doubt you'd keep together, be in time,

HELEN *enters in simple but striking evening dress*
in exquisite unison, in beautiful harmony, and you'd both be happy and we'd be happy Whereas—

HELEN William, you always go on too long

WILLIAM (*rather annoyed*) How do you mean—I always go on too long?

HELEN You shouldn't go on with that *Whereas* Nobody wants your *whereas* And it's pompous You're rather inclined to be pompous, you know

WILLIAM (*horrified*) Pompous! My dear Helen, I'm the least pompous man who ever lived

JOYCE You're *all* pompous

HELEN Perfectly true, Joyce, dear They *are* all pompous But when William has a grievance, I think he's really above the average in pompousness

PHILIP *audibly guffaws* WILLIAM *glares across at him.*

WILLIAM If you're going to snigger and provide her with an appreciative audience, she'll go on for hours.

HELEN Audience! That reminds me (*To the audience, with tremendous charm*) I'm so sorry about all this Do excuse us, please

WILLIAM (*growling* *Pats her on the shoulder*) I've said that already

HELEN (*sweetly*) Possibly, but perhaps when a little charm is added to the apology—

WILLIAM (*cutting in*) Charm! If there's one quality more contemptible than another in your contemptible bag of tricks, it's this

famous feminine charm As soon as I see that rotten little piece of scented silk run up as a flag, I know that honesty and decency are about to be scuttled

PHILIP And I agree

HELEN (*turning to PHILIP*) Only because you haven't any, Philip dear

PHILIP Oh—I don't know about that

HELEN (*smiling sweetly at PHILIP*) No, Philip, you don't know about it

WILLIAM (*staring at her, then turning her round to face him*) Now what's the matter with you?

HELEN (*with wide-eyed innocence*) Nothing that I know of, William Why?

WILLIAM Because you're behaving very badly, that's why You come on here, looking—I must admit—very delightful, shining and smiling upon us like a May moon——

HELEN Thank you, my pet

WILLIAM I'm not your pet And keep away, keep away!

HELEN Oh—why?

WILLIAM Because—well, it's less confusing and easier for me to say what I have to say——

HELEN Then don't say it Nobody cares

WILLIAM And what I say is that you come on here and instead of trying to help us out of our little difficulty, you at once make everything worse Now why—why—do you go and make everything worse?

HELEN Shall I tell you?

WILLIAM (*exasperated*) I'm asking you to tell me Though I doubt if you know

HELEN Oh yes, I do It's perfectly simple You see, being a woman I must be noticed and appreciated. We take a great deal of trouble over our appearance—about twenty times as much trouble as you do, for instance—and we insist upon first being noticed and appreciated Now if you'd said, at once, that I was looking very nice, or if you'd only smiled at me, that would have been quite enough Immediately I'd have felt full of goodwill and kindness and helpfulness, and I'd have tried to do my best for everybody But first of all I must be noticed and appreciated

WILLIAM That seems to me all wrong

HELEN Yes, but then you happen to be a man and I happen to be a woman

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

WILLIAM It shouldn't make so much difference

HELEN But it does

WILLIAM Well, does it? I know women who aren't like that

HELEN Yes, and how much time do you spend with them?

JOYCE *bursts out laughing*

WILLIAM (*speaking to JOYCE*) I think you'd better start playing again

HELEN (*rising*) No, not yet

WILLIAM Why not?

JOYCE *stops playing*

HELEN We ought to look into this a little more, this man-and-woman business

PHILIP (*with gloomy approval*) Yes, it needs looking into

HELEN Of course it does Now it's no use taking ourselves, is it?

WILLIAM (*brightening at this*) Not a bit Lot of talk about ourselves—only leads to trouble—scenes, temper and tears—terrible! No use, you see, unless you can be detached

HELEN You love being detached, don't you?

WILLIAM Can't observe properly unless you're detached That's obvious

HELEN All right then, we'll take some other pair

PHILIP What about Henry and Muriel?

JOYCE Dull

WILLIAM Very dull

HELEN I'm afraid you're right Well, you suggest somebody

WILLIAM Boris and Nina

HELEN Oh—no, just a long cat-and-dog fight broken by an occasional orgy

WILLIAM (*thoughtfully*) True. Though I've always wanted to be in at an orgy All this writing and talk about orgies, and yet you never seem to catch up with one Every place I've ever been to, they've always just stopped having them "You ought to have been here last year," they say "It was terrible"

PHILIP I know.

JOYCE How do you mean, you know?

WILLIAM Now, Joyce, don't you two start all over again Look at your music or something—

HELEN (*triumphantly*) I know the very pair. Not too dull, not too wild Very nice and rather typical Paul and Rosemary.

WILLIAM Rosemary and Paul Yes, they might do Pleasant pair
As you say, nice people Not very intelligent, perhaps, but I can
supply the intelligence——

HELEN And you've heard what's happening to them?

WILLIAM No Not busting up, are they?

HELEN Sit down and pay attention You'll see Joyce, Philip!

They begin playing some broken, discordant music Curtains open, to reveal room whose few props suggest waiting-room in a solicitor's office PAUL, in middle thirties, with horn-rimmed spectacles and wearing dark overcoat and muffler (to facilitate quick change) is moving about like a man kept waiting for an unpleasant appointment A noise outside, then ROSEMARY'S voice is heard off, saying, "Oh in here Thank you!" She enters also wearing heavy coat, and looking pale and miserable She stares at him He looks very embarrassed

PAUL (*with an effort*) I'm afraid this is—er—rather embarrassing
—Rosemary

ROSEMARY (*with similar effort*) Yes—Paul—I'm afraid it is

PAUL Well, it's not my fault I had a note from Coulson asking me to be here at half-past three—to answer some questions about the—the divorce

ROSEMARY (*tiny voice*) Yes, so had I

PAUL (*restlessly*) Oh, I say—monstrous thing for Coulson to do—asking us both here at the same time Shows you how blankly insensitive these lawyers are Typical lawyer's trick, this Damn Coulson!

ROSEMARY (*faintly*) Oh—I don't think—it's perhaps—(*dies away*)

PAUL What?

ROSEMARY No—nothing

PAUL Look here, I'll go and wait out there

ROSEMARY No—it——

PAUL Don't mind a bit

Goes, crossing in front of her Just as he has passed, she makes a movement as if to halt him, but then sinks back He goes out and we hear the door closing behind him She stares after him, then her face begins working, and then she starts sobbing

WILLIAM I say, this is too bad

Curtains close

Now, Helen.

The curtains have closed and with the broken discordant music as before

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

HELEN (*sympathetically and satirically*) What made it all the worse, of course, is that obviously it was she who had asked their solicitor to send for them both at the same time

WILLIAM Yes, but I can't see why she should do that if they were arranging a divorce

HELEN Because she was hoping that a miracle might have happened, that, seeing her again, he might have discovered he was still in love with her We're always hoping for miracles like that And then—well, you saw

WILLIAM Yes, but mind you, if he'd been completely indifferent he'd have stayed in there He went out chiefly for her sake

HELEN She thought he went out because he couldn't even stand the sight of her

WILLIAM Quite wrong What a lot of muddlers we are, aren't we? She ought to be crying over the human race There *is* something to cry about

HELEN (*very gravely*) She was crying because once there was love and now there is no love If we can't cry over the grave of love, what are our tears for? I could cry a little myself

WILLIAM (*anxiously*) Now, now! Now, now! Don't you start, my dear Besides, we must keep our detachment, or we'll never learn anything (*To the pianists*) Play something quiet but cheerful

They begin to play, HELEN turns to him and smiles, he takes her hand

That's better Let me see now, how did this begin? Where, when and how did Paul and Rosemary first meet?

HELEN (*slowly, reflectively*) She told me once Her father gave Paul some architectural job, and asked him to come and dine. You'll have to be Rosemary's father Go on

WILLIAM I thought for a moment you said I'd have to be Rosemary's father

HELEN That's what I did say Go on

WILLIAM Certainly Great pleasure Only not for long y'know.
Goes out Arch left

HELEN It takes some girls months, even years, before they know, but she seemed to know at once

Curtains open, music swells up, disclosing a corner of a drawing-room Small table with sherry, cigarettes, etc No chairs ROSEMARY, looking younger and prettier, is pouring out the sherry PAUL, who looks younger without the spectacles, comes in, followed

by WILLIAM, wearing grey wig and moustache as Rosemary's father ROSEMARY *pours out three glasses of sherry*

WILLIAM (*in older man's voice*) Ah—you haven't met my daughter Rosemary, I think My dear—Mr Paul Weybridge

They smile and shake hands

Glass of sherry, eh? (ROSEMARY *hands* PAUL and WILLIAM *a glass of sherry*) Thank you, my dear

ROSEMARY (*smiling at PAUL*) And how's the bungalow?

PAUL (*smiling back at her*) I think it's going to be grand

ROSEMARY I thought your idea for it awfully clever

PAUL Thank you

They raise their glasses at the same time and smile at each other significantly over the top of them

WILLIAM (*rambling on without noticing them*) Yes, yes—I think Weybridge realises now exactly what I've always had in mind Convenient and cosy are my two watch-words Easy and cheap to run, but snug Plenty of weather outside, on the top of that cliff (*pours out another glass of sherry*) but none inside, eh, Weybridge?

PAUL (*who is lost*) What? Oh—yes, rather—that's the idea

WILLIAM Made a little sketch or two I wanted to show you Have 'em in my den This way, my boy

WILLIAM *goes out* PAUL, *obviously reluctantly, hands glass to* ROSEMARY, *there is a pause between them* He *turns and goes out* Music *plays softly for a moment or two, she stands in a day-dream* Then *music stops and she comes forward a pace or two and speaks to HELEN*

ROSEMARY Really I knew then Or one part of me did

HELEN (*with sympathy*) I know

ROSEMARY That part of me which seems to stand back always and isn't caught up with every moment

HELEN Yes, the part that can see far ahead, in a dim sort of way, and seems to know what's coming

ROSEMARY That's exactly it, Helen But how does it work? I mean, it's just as if behind the little *Now* there's this big *Now*, in which all at once you've met a man and loved him for years and lost him And how can that be?

HELEN I don't know, darling I don't believe anybody knows

Curtains close WILLIAM *enters briskly as himself through curtains*

WILLIAM I know It's a question of movement along the fourth dimension—

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HELEN What is?

WILLIAM These two Nows—two different kinds of time Now imagine yourself travelling with the speed of light—a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second—along the fourth dimension——

JOYCE No

PHILIP No

HELEN No thank you, William

WILLIAM I thought you wanted to know

HELEN Not just now, thank you Some other time Now I wonder when Paul realised he was falling in love with Rosemary?

WILLIAM Does it matter?

HELEN Of course it matters

WILLIAM Well, he told me it was about the third or fourth time he went there They were just saying good-bye in the hall

Curtains open HELEN waves WILLIAM off rostrum The inner stage is now set as an entrance hall PAUL, dressed in light overcoat and carrying hat, is about to say good night

ROSEMARY (*lightly*) You know, if your taxi is ticking its life away outside, you needn't wait for Father He may be ages digging out that old photograph, but he can easily post it to you

PAUL (*rather nervously*) Well, the taxi is there, so I suppose I'd better go (*He hesitates, then, with a rush*) I wondered—well, the fact is, I've been working too hard lately to go out much, but a—er—client gave me two seats for the Haymarket for next Thursday, and—er—I wondered—whether you'd like to come along with me We might have some supper afterwards if you like—and—er—dance——

ROSEMARY (*slowly*) Thursday? Yes, I'd love to

PAUL We'll have to meet at the theatre, if you don't mind as I'm afraid I shan't have time to dine

ROSEMARY No, of course not We can find out what time it begins, can't we?

PAUL Yes, I don't think they make any secret of that Well—Thursday then——

They shake hands, he hesitates

I suppose you probably go out nearly every night—with fellows who are rolling in money—but to me Thursday will be quite an occasion.

ROSEMARY (*with apparent calm*) Oh—I'm looking forward to it too.

PAUL I—— Good night

Goes out

ROSEMARY (*as he goes*) Good night

Then, after a short pause talking with great urgency to herself
Thursday, Thursday, Thursday I'll have to put Alice off, of course, but she won't mind. Also the Kershaws can't come to tea because I may not get back from the hairdresser's in time, but I can easily put them off. Now if I wear my blue I've time to get another belt—and—oh!—some shoes—I'll go down on Wednesday with Alice and buy the shoes. That black bag's filthy but it'll have to do. Unless I can get a blue one—like Alice's—she said it was quite cheap—where was it? Somewhere in Regent Street

WILLIAM *rises, points to HELEN*

I might look at them while I'm getting the shoes. But perhaps after all it might be better to wear the white, though it'll be creased in the theatre and might look terrible afterwards,

WILLIAM *is trying to attract HELEN's attention*
and that means wearing my rotten old red velvet coat—I might have it cleaned, but they're horribly slow at that place—

WILLIAM No, no, no

Curtains close

Can't have any more of that. Drive a man barmy! (*Looks at HELEN, who is calm and smiling*) How long would she go on like that?

HELEN Hours and hours probably

WILLIAM Good God! But the evening she's going to have simply won't be worth all that agonising. Better to stop at home

HELEN Nonsense!

WILLIAM Did you go through all that?

HELEN Certainly—still do, sometimes

WILLIAM and PHILIP (*shaking their heads*) Simply isn't worth it

HELEN We think it is

JOYCE And so—really—do you.

WILLIAM You know—I believe the secret of you women is—you've got far less individual conceit than we have

JOYCE and HELEN But—of course.

JOYCE That's why we take so much trouble with ourselves

WILLIAM On the other hand, as a sex, you seem to have an enormous collective conceit

HELEN How do you mean?

WILLIAM —Well, you're all convinced that though individually you may not be up to much, Woman herself is a tremendous treat

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That's why if a man starts falling out of love with one of you, you always believe it's because he's falling in love with another one

JOYCE And nine times out of ten, at least, we're right!

WILLIAM It's a sort of trades union concert We can't do without a member of the union And very annoyed you are too when we prove we can

HELEN When you can ignore us, you've said good-bye to all hope of magic

WILLIAM Magic of a kind Often a witch's brew But we can do without your magic, because we're all sons of Adam, who did without it once But you're all the daughters of poor Eve, who was never by herself, but found Adam already there——

HELEN And ever since Eve we've felt socially responsible and even as guests we're still anxious hostesses

PHILIP (*calling out*) Too much talk!

He nods to JOYCE and they burst into loud dance music, which quietens down as WILLIAM speaks

WILLIAM (*turning and going upstage with his back to the audience, puts on a pair of spectacles, turns and comes downstage again*) Now this is where I might indulge in one of these philosophical disquisitions on Jazz and the Spirit of the Age, which were so popular a few years ago

HELEN (*takes off his spectacles, puts them in his breast pocket*) This is a few years ago, but you're not here to philosophise but to dance

Takes his hand, leads him up on to centre of rostrum The music is loud again PAUL and ROSEMARY enter from alcove, they go on to rostrum, both couples start dancing PAUL in dinner jacket, ROSEMARY in evening dress

WILLIAM (*as they dance*) Having a grand time, isn't she?

HELEN Yes So is he Both of 'em just working up to something drastic Lovely

WILLIAM Might be lovely (*Pause*) Might not Can't tell (*Pause*) Never understand why you women always want to help on the biological process Pairing everybody off as if you were all Mrs Noah and it had started to rain

HELEN We know what life's about

WILLIAM My pet, you haven't the foggiest idea

WILLIAM bumps into PAUL at the end of the dance

WILLIAM (*to PAUL*) Sorry

Music stops and the four stop PAUL and the two women clap enthusiastically, WILLIAM perfunctorily They join up now apparently standing on edge of dance floor)

HELEN You know William, of course, don't you? Paul, Rosemary

WILLIAM (*to ROSEMARY*) Enjoying yourself, I can see that

ROSEMARY Yes, I am, aren't you?

WILLIAM Not much

ROSEMARY Oh, what a shame! I like this place (*Looks about happily*)

WILLIAM (*looking about unhappily*) I don't It frightens me

ROSEMARY Some of the people do look pretty awful

WILLIAM And some look awfully pretty But that's not it Consider the social and philosophical background—

ROSEMARY I don't think I want to very much to-night

WILLIAM (*almost as if announcing a lecture*) Jazz, Swing, and the Spirit of the Age—

HELEN (*breaking off talk with PAUL*) No, William, not to-night And the Cabaret will be starting soon Naked young women

WILLIAM (*gloomily*) And the dirty songs at the piano

Dance music again, not too loud

PAUL (*happily*) Rosemary!

ROSEMARY (*happily*) Yes, Paul? (*Taking his hand*)

PAUL Let's dance

They start dancing round and about

WILLIAM What's the matter with 'em now?

HELEN It's the first time he's ever called her Rosemary and the first time she's ever called him Paul

Alcove curtain held open, the other two, still dancing, smile and go off

And you needn't look so glum about it That's a very important moment Don't you remember the first time I ever called you William?

WILLIAM No And I think I've had enough of this schoolgirl stuff It's like being forcibly fed with golden syrup

HELEN You're envious really, y'know

WILLIAM (*horrified*) What—of that—mushy idiocy! (*Burlesquing their eager happy look and tone*) Paul!

PHILIP Rosemary!

HELEN (*coolly*) Not of what he's doing, but of his state of mind And now you're going to see the next stage Do you remember what the next stage is?

WILLIAM (*cheering up a little*). Yes Bed *

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HELEN No These aren't that kind. Think now He's taken her out for several evenings—dining—dancing, to a play or a film—and they're not shy any longer but are beginning to talk

WILLIAM Yes, I know now They're beginning to talk their heads off, and everything that each of them says, the other thinks is wonderful The way they have the same tastes, the very same likes and dislikes—it's miraculous

HELEN She'll have to cheat a bit, of course

WILLIAM (*sardonically*) Oh, of course!

HELEN But not as much as you think

WILLIAM Look at the way you pretended to like chess and be interested in politics

HELEN (*scornfully*) Oh!—chess and politics, there's a limit But she won't have to cheat very much, she's still an impressionable and rather unformed sort of girl, and his very feeling for her, and her response to it, do really bring her unconsciously into line with his point of view

Curtains open to disclose scene arranged to represent corner of drawing-room PAUL sits in chair, ROSEMARY on stool Both in evening clothes, very eager, inwardly excited Note During this scene HELEN quietly goes out, to make her change

PAUL (*eagerly*) I never knew you'd been there

ROSEMARY (*same*) Yes, I absolutely loved it I've always been hoping to go there again

PAUL So have I By Jove, if we could only—(*breaks off, then resumes*) And the castle, you know, is one of the most amusing pieces of baroque I know

ROSEMARY Yes, isn't it? I adore baroque

PAUL Well, I wouldn't go as far as that It's *amusing*

ROSEMARY That's what I mean, Paul It's terribly *amusing* That's all, of course No more than that Not like—well——

PAUL Let's say, Perpendicular Gothic or French Renaissance

ROSEMARY Of course not They're absolutely wonderful I've nearly finished that book you lent me on the French Renaissance Completely enchanting. Have you played the Sibelius records yet?

PAUL (*sitting forward*) Yes I put them on to-night, just before I came out You're right, of course He's head and shoulders above all the rest

ROSEMARY (*joyfully*) Oh—I'm glad you feel like that about him, Paul

PAUL Yes, he gives me just the same feeling you described—sort

of—you know, cold and stern yet with a kind of deep warmth inside——

ROSEMARY That's it exactly It's absurd saying you don't understand music——

PAUL And it's absurd saying you don't understand architecture, Rosemary Some people have a natural good taste, a flair, and you're one of 'em And I haven't met many

They exchange a smile and lean to each other

ROSEMARY Won't you have another whisky and soda——?

PAUL No, thanks I must go in a minute

They look at each other and smile

WILLIAM (*the interested spectator, after a pause*) Well, what about it? Come on Everything's all set

PAUL (*slowly, shyly, looking away from her to out front*) It's queer, you know

ROSEMARY What is, Paul?

PAUL The way you go on perhaps for years not meeting anybody who's really your own kind, who likes the same things you like, who can have fun with you or be serious, just as the mood takes you both, until you begin to think you're an odd kind of bird and almost alone in the world

WILLIAM Extraordinary how people can imagine they're so different from the crowd (*Turns to PHILIP at piano*) Paul and his odd kind of bird! One of the most commonplace fellows I know! Scores just like him eating biscuits and cheese in every club dining room

PHILIP Sh—Sh—Sh—(*Points to stage*)

PAUL (*as before*) And then, quite suddenly, you meet somebody

ROSEMARY (*fervently*) Yes, I know

PAUL As we met

ROSEMARY Yes And that's the nicest thing anybody's ever said to me

PAUL (*putting out a hand*) Rosemary!

ROSEMARY (*giving him her hand*) Dear Paul!

They kiss

He has pulled her towards him and she is now in his arms and he is kissing her They are enthusiastic but look a trifle awkward.

Curtains close

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WILLIAM Yes, yes! Yes, yes! They'll be hours now excitedly explaining their uniqueness to each other

JOYCE (*stoutly*) Quite right too!

WILLIAM (*surprised*) Joyce, Joyce!

JOYCE Well, that's how they feel, and they're quite right

WILLIAM Yes, yes, Joyce Nobody's blaming them All very natural and pleasant, only of course we don't want to be in at it All rather cloying and tedious to the onlooker Where's Helen?

PHILIP She went out during that last scene

WILLIAM (*calling*) Helen—Helen

HELEN (*off, just behind nearest curtain*) Shut up, I'm here

WILLIAM What are you doing there?

HELEN Turning myself into Paul's mother They're engaged now and Paul is going to introduce Rosemary to his mother A big moment

WILLIAM Undoubtedly a big moment And I think Rosemary's father ought to put in an appearance

HELEN (*urgently*) No, that's not necessary Now don't be silly, darling

WILLIAM (*with dignity*) There is nothing silly about it

He goes out

Curtains open showing scene, corner of another drawing-room with a settee PAUL and ROSEMARY are standing together, looking rather anxious

PAUL But you dear delightful idiot, what have you to be anxious about? I tell you, she'll adore you. After all, I ought to know She's my mother

ROSEMARY I know, darling That's just it

PAUL The only thing you've got to be afraid of is that very soon, if we're not careful, she'll settle down to tell you what I was like when I was cutting my first teeth or going down with whooping cough

ROSEMARY Oh—I don't mind that. In fact, I'd love to know what you were like when you were tiny That's the point about being in love You want to know *all* about the other person

PAUL I'd hate to know about you at the age of two I wish mother'd hurry up Though we were rather early

ROSEMARY (*nervously*) I think she's here

He gives her a reassuring pat and she gives him a rather desperate quick smile. HELEN now enters as PAUL's mother, wearing different

dress, grey wig, spectacles perhaps, and proceeds to give a performance as a solemn matron

HELEN I'm so sorry Well, Paul! (*Smiles and he kisses her cheek lightly*)

PAUL Mother, this—is Rosemary

The two women smile, but stare hard at each other

HELEN (*with marked change to effusive tone*) Well, well, well! So this is Rosemary (*Shakes her head and smiles at ROSEMARY*) You've given me a real surprise, my dear I'd begun to think Paul was a born bachelor And now—here you are (*Embraces and kisses ROSEMARY*)

ROSEMARY (*shyly*) Yes—and—I'm very, very happy

HELEN I'm sure you are And I know Paul is too

PAUL Tremendously happy, Mother

HELEN (*smiling*) And if he's happy, you may be sure I am, having spoilt him all his life

ROSEMARY (*smiling*) He doesn't seem very spoilt

PAUL (*very playfully*) Just you wait! Eh, Mother?

HELEN (*archly*) Yes, indeed Though I may be able to show Rosemary one or two little tricks—to keep you in order

Mime talk between HELEN and ROSEMARY All three smile at each other, rather fatuously

PHILIP (*across to JOYCE*) Oh—Lord I hate this dialogue

JOYCE I know Loathsome! But it's about what they'd say

Enter WILLIAM breezily in make-up as before as Rosemary's father

WILLIAM Well, well, well! Here we are, then

ROSEMARY (*astounded*) But—Father—what are you doing here?

PAUL This is a surprise, sir

HELEN (*after glaring at WILLIAM*) My surprise this time

WILLIAM Yes, yes, quite right Her surprise Most amusing!

PAUL Yes—but—how did you—?

WILLIAM (*bluffly*) Oh, your mother'll explain

HELEN (*after another glare at WILLIAM*) You see, dear, Rosemary's father and I are old friends

WILLIAM (*bluffly*) That's right Old—old—friends

HELEN So I told him over the telephone he'd better come along and give you both a surprise

WILLIAM And here I am, giving you a surprise (*To PAUL*) Well,

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I expect Rosemary and your mother will have lots to talk about—so suppose we leave 'em to it Eh?

HELEN No, no You men stay here while I take Rosemary with me and get to know her properly (*Takes ROSEMARY'S arm*) I'm sure you must have a lot to say to each other

They turn to go together

WILLIAM (*bluffly*) Yes, yes, naturally Young man marrying my only daughter

HELEN Yes, well—have a nice intimate man's talk together Come along, Rosemary

Women go out WILLIAM and PAUL sit on sofa Both men look stiff and uncomfortable and should be deliberately wooden in attitude and speech

WILLIAM Humph! All right to smoke?

PAUL Oh—yes, of course Sorry Cigarette?

WILLIAM (*producing case*) No thanks Never smoke 'em Cigar?

PAUL No thanks Can't cope with cigars Wish I could

Both men light up and look straight in front of them throughout following dialogue, which should be slow and wooden

WILLIAM I used to smoke a lot of cigars one time

PAUL Did you?

WILLIAM Yes, I did Used to get 'em by the thousand direct from Cuba Wonderful cigars

PAUL I'll bet they were Best place for cigars, of course

WILLIAM Only place for cigars, really

PAUL (*pause*) Know much about the South African market, sir?

WILLIAM No Never touch it Why?

PAUL Nothing really Just wondered Client of mine seems to have made a lot out of it, that's all

WILLIAM I believe you can Must be in the know, though (*Pause*) D'you ever go out after wild duck—?

PAUL No Friend of mine does

WILLIAM Does he? (*Pause*) What's his name?

PAUL Sanderson

WILLIAM Not old Billy Sanderson, used to be out in Malaya?

PAUL No, this chap's about my age In the City He's very keen on wild duck (*Pause*)

WILLIAM It's a wonderful sport (*Pause*)

PAUL I tried my hand at trout—trout last year

WILLIAM Did you? (*Pause*) Dry fly?

PAUL Yes

WILLIAM I never could get on with it Needs too much practice for me

PAUL Does really I wasn't much good

WILLIAM No, neither was I (*Pause*)

HELEN *now appears outside rostrum* If practicable she should look her ordinary self

HELEN (*scornfully*) A nice intimate man's talk together, eh? Just like two people made out of wood, sitting there grunting at each other! What do you think you're doing?

WILLIAM (*to PAUL, hands his cigar to him to hold for a moment*) Excuse me a moment, my boy

PAUL (*who doesn't see HELEN*) Certainly

He remains in wooden attitude, while WILLIAM comes forward to talk to HELEN He takes off his wig and moustache to show that he is now his ordinary self

WILLIAM What's the matter?

HELEN Is that your idea of a nice intimate talk between a father and his prospective son-in-law?

WILLIAM Yes

HELEN (*indignantly*) But—it's just nothing Cigars and wild duck!

WILLIAM A bit impersonal, of course

HELEN A bit impersonal!

WILLIAM You can see the reason, can't you?

HELEN No, I can't

WILLIAM Just shows how insensitive you women are

HELEN (*aghast*) What?

WILLIAM (*coolly*) Yes, insensitive We can't get up to your loquacious tricks, pouring out floods of horribly intimate stuff, displaying our underclothes

HELEN Who wants you to display your underclothes?

WILLIAM The fact is, we're shy

HELEN But what is there to be shy about?

WILLIAM This biology we're suddenly caught up in He's shy because very soon he's going to take my daughter away and share a bedroom with her And I'm shy because I know he's going to——

HELEN Yes, yes, yes

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WILLIAM We're the shy sex, you know Always were Now I'll get back and finish this off

Puts on moustache and wig and goes back to sofa PAUL *hands back cigar* *The two men play just in same manner as before*
WILLIAM *settles down in middle of sofa* HELEN *goes out to change back into Paul's mother*

PAUL How do you like this car you're trying?

WILLIAM Very comfortable, but find her a bit sluggish so far

PAUL Engine needs running in, eh?

WILLIAM Probably But don't think she's very nippy (Pause)
You fairly busy now?

PAUL Yes We're competing for that big Birmingham job

WILLIAM Hope you get it

PAUL We stand a fair chance But that's really my partner's pigeon

WILLIAM Yes I suppose you'll manage to get away all right after the—er—wedding?

PAUL Yes I've fixed that all right Hope to manage a month

WILLIAM Good! Any idea where you're going?

PAUL Not quite decided yet Might motor across France and end up at the Italian lakes

WILLIAM Good trip Sorry I can't be with you (Guffaws awkwardly)

They look at each other PAUL *laughs awkwardly*

(Shy and solemn now) I know you'll try and make her happy, my boy

PAUL It won't be my fault if she isn't, sir

WILLIAM No doubt Won't be hers, though Happiest little thing you ever saw Not like some of 'em, always whining and moping Miss her, y'know, my boy Miss her like the devil However, there it is, there it is

PAUL and WILLIAM rise HELEN as Paul's mother and ROSEMARY enter *They look happy and thick as thieves*

HELEN (gaily) Now, you two I know you're having a wonderful talk and telling one another all your secrets Don't stop But there are drinks in your room, Paul, and I thought you'd like to go along there

WILLIAM Good idea

PAUL Yes, rather How's it going, Rosemary?

ROSEMARY Grand!

HELEN Passed with honours, didn't you, dear? Now, off you go

The men go out, WILLIAM to change back at once to ordinary self As PAUL passes ROSEMARY he pats her arm The two women get into a feminine huddle, very confidential and close, and talking rapidly

HELEN Yes, dear, I think you're very wise to take a nice little flat at first

ROSEMARY I thought a little flat would be best, at first Afterwards of course——

HELEN Afterwards, of course, when you've settled down properly then perhaps Paul might build you a house about twenty or thirty miles out (*Looks to her and smiles*) But at first, I know you'll both be happier in some convenient little flat in town Paul's very fond of the country, of course——

ROSEMARY I am too I love the country

HELEN I'm sure you do And of course for young children I think the country's perfect But you've no need to think about that yet (*Smiles*) In the meantime, you're quite right to want a nice little flat Not a service flat, eh?

ROSEMARY No, I don't think so

HELEN Saves trouble with maids, of course And cooks

ROSEMARY But they're so terribly expensive, aren't they?

HELEN Most of the ones I know are, but there may be cheaper ones now, though what the food and service will be like I don't know And Paul's rather fastidious about food, you know Which reminds me, Rosemary, don't try and make Paul give up his club I know he's so fond of it

ROSEMARY Oh—I wouldn't dream of it Of course not He'll want to see other men But I thought if we had a nice little flat somewhere fairly central——

HELEN, Of course, you're absolutely right You couldn't do better, at first, than start with a nice little flat, preferably somewhere fairly central If you could find a reasonably cheap service flat, of course——

WILLIAM enters from alcove

WILLIAM I say!

ROSEMARY Oh—we'd take it like a shot, if it wasn't too dear Because after all, it would save trouble with maids and cooks

WILLIAM I say!

HELEN That's the point As long as the food and service are not too bad Paul's rather——

WILLIAM (*almost in despair*) Look here!

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HELEN (*after giving him a sharp look*) My dear, I'm sure I've kept you too long from Paul. Run along to his room, where I was showing you the photographs, and you'll find him there.

ROSEMARY (*rising spontaneously*) Oh—I'm so happy.

HELEN I know you are, Rosemary, and I think you've every right to be, for you're a very lucky girl.

The two women kiss, ROSEMARY exits. HELEN looks at WILLIAM, pushes the sofa upstage with her foot, in irritation, the curtains close.

WILLIAM (*going up on to rostrum and speaking through curtains*) I'm sorry—I say—I'm sorry. (*To PHILIP*) I believe she's annoyed.

PHILIP I know she was.

JOYCE She was furious—and quite right too. You deliberately broke into her scene.

WILLIAM But she interrupted me when I was Rosemary's father. Still I'll try again. I'm sorry. Hearing me, of course, but not answering. I'm sorry. You don't call that conversation, an exchange of views, opinions, ideas, experiences, do you? You were going round and round in a tiny circle. You were simply making cooing noises at each other.

JOYCE (*rather sharply*) Of course they were. They knew that.

WILLIAM Well, but what's the point of it?

PHILIP I've been wondering for years.

HELEN *enters from alcove as herself.*

HELEN Don't be so dense. A girl has just met the mother of the man she's going to marry. A woman has just met the girl her son is going to marry. An ordeal for both of them.

WILLIAM Yes, I can see that, dense as I am.

HELEN Well, then they discover, to their great relief, that they're ready to like each other. The ordeal's over. It's going to be all right.

WILLIAM And so instead of exchanging experiences, opinions, ideas.

HELEN They'll do that much later on.

WILLIAM They make a lot of nice agreeing noises together, eh?

HELEN That's it. Women can't jog along on parallel lines as men seem able to do. They're always either going away from each other or coming together. And these two were coming together, and proving it. See?

WILLIAM Yes. But what a life.

HELEN Of course, it's ten times harder than being a man. But far more amusing, I fancy. (*Hesitates*) Now this is rather awkward.

WILLIAM Why what's wrong

HELEN We have to be two different characters soon—guests at the wedding reception——

WILLIAM Oh, have we? That's all right I shall be Major Spanner, back from the East and an old friend and admirer of the bride No trouble about that

WILLIAM *exits*

HELEN Now, Joyce dear, I think we ought to show Paul and Rosemary just for a minute before the wedding Something romantic— young—touching——

JOYCE (*rising*) Yes

HELEN A rainy evening in Spring—wet lilac—and the moon lighting her upturned face——

PHILIP (*rising*) Then you'll want some music

HELEN Essential

HELEN *exits*

JOYCE Chopin I think

PHILIP Certainly One of the Nocturnes?

JOYCE No The Fantasy Impromptu Middle Section

PHILIP All right, but don't go wrong with the triplets in the left hand

JOYCE No, of course not Yes, Chopin coming through some mysterious lighted window Didn't you always think, when you were young, that there was something magical about those houses where somebody was playing a piano?

PHILIP No I didn't

JOYCE You didn't? Why, I used to feel there must be something terribly special about the people in that house—that they were living an enchanted life that I'd never know What's the matter with you?

PHILIP (*sighs*) I suppose the trouble is I just don't think big, beautiful thoughts

JOYCE Oh, you're hopeless (*Joyce goes back and sits at piano left*)

PHILIP Well I think we're all set Lights (*Sits at piano right*)

Lights dim on stage Some moonlight comes on PAUL and ROSEMARY enter from alcove wearing light raincoats, walking close and lovingly They stop in a moonlight spot.

ROSEMARY Darling!

PAUL What, darling?

ROSEMARY The lilac

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PAUL Yes, marvellous

Softly the Chopin music begins They listen rapturously

ROSEMARY Chopin Perfect!

PAUL Perfect Only three days now, darling

ROSEMARY Only three days

PAUL I love you

ROSEMARY I love you

They kiss, the moonlight spot fades They exit

The Pianists begin a quiet amusing version of the Wedding March The first Pianist comes up to full strength as the lighting comes up too The curtain is drawn to reveal the inner stage set as corner of a large room where wedding reception is being held There are one or two small tables, with champagne, glasses, food, etc A lot of noise off, both direct and recorded—chatter, noise of plates and glasses

HELEN enters as Mrs de Folyat, a handsome vivacious widow of about thirty-five with an intense arch manner, with champagne glass in her hand

WILLIAM now enters as Major George Spanner, a military rather wooden, bronzed man about forty, who is slightly tight in a rather depressed fashion, and is also busy removing bits of confetti from his clothes

HELEN (*shouting*) I beg your pardon?

WILLIAM (*shouting*) Sorry What did you say?

HELEN (*as before*) I said "I beg your pardon"

WILLIAM (*as before*) Certainly—certainly——

HELEN What time is it?

WILLIAM Sorry—can't hear you

HELEN (*top of her voice*) I said—What time is it?

It happens as she says this that the noise has suddenly stopped, so that it sounds very loud indeed WILLIAM glances suspiciously at her before looking at his watch

WILLIAM Twenty to four

HELEN What a ghastly hour! Let me see, aren't you Major Spanner?

WILLIAM Yes Sorry—I don't remember——

HELEN No, we weren't introduced Somebody pointed you out to me I'm Mrs de Folyat

WILLIAM Oh yes How d'you do?

HELEN Do you think it all went off very well?

WILLIAM Suppose so No judge really Don't care for all this business Beastly functions

HELEN Definitely Let me see, you're out East, aren't you?

WILLIAM Yes (*Pause*) Rubber

HELEN That must be wonderful

HELEN *is waving off to somebody again*

WILLIAM It was once But ever since the bottom dropped out of the market it's been terrible

HELEN (*with vague enthusiasm*) Yes, but the life there—the colour, the romance, the mystery! The temple bells The sense of eternity Do you practise yoga?

WILLIAM (*horrified*) Good lord!—No! I'm not in India by the way Straits Settlements Fifteen hundred miles away from India

HELEN Is it really? But then I suppose it's all much bigger out there than one imagines

WILLIAM Oh—enormous People here have not the faintest notion They ask me to look up fellas who are two thousand miles away from my place

HELEN (*who has been glancing about her*) Do they really? I wonder why?

She waves as if good-bye to some people who are leaving and makes this very big

WILLIAM (*disturbed and looking to where she is waving*) Well, because they don't realise these fellas are two thousand miles away

HELEN (*confidentially*) I think I shall slip away now This seems a good chance (*She comes forward to front of rostrum*)

WILLIAM (*with a quick glance round*) Yes, rather I was just going out Join you, I think

He joins HELEN The curtains close Once outside they halt, relieved, as if they had sneaked out of a hotel room It is now presumed they are in a street

HELEN (*taking deep breath*) Ah!—it's so good to be in the fresh air again

WILLIAM Yes Frightful row in there Hate those scimmages. Taxi!

HELEN (*archly*) Are you bride or bridegroom?

WILLIAM (*astounded, pause*) What?

HELEN I mean, one of her friends or one of his?

WILLIAM Oh, one of hers Don't know him at all. Known little

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Rosemary since she was a child Friend of the family Rosemary's
grown up to be a very fine girl

HELEN Has she? Taxi!

WILLIAM (*with genuine enthusiasm*) Yes, decidedly No doubt
about that Weybridge is a very lucky fella Hope he realises it

HELEN Major Spanner, I do believe— (*Breaks off*)

WILLIAM (*intimidatingly wooden*) What?

HELEN No, no, I don't know you well enough I mustn't say it
As a matter of fact I don't know her at all And I've only recently
met Paul Weybridge He's an architect, you know

WILLIAM Yes, so I gather

HELEN And a very clever one He's been adding a wing to my
little place in the country, *quite* brilliantly

WILLIAM He has, has he? Taxi! (*Waving his stick*)

HELEN I couldn't help thinking it a pity that a man who has
obviously such a tremendous future should go and—

WILLIAM What?

HELEN Now, now, Major Spanner, you mustn't tempt me to be
indiscreet

WILLIAM (*bewildered*) Didn't know I was doing so

HELEN Besides, it's quite clear I can't expect any sympathy
from you

WILLIAM (*stiffly*) Now look here, Mrs de Folyat, if you're suggest-
ing he oughtn't to have married because his wife isn't good enough
for him—

HELEN Now I never said that I merely hinted that perhaps—

WILLIAM Because if so, I'll give you my opinion, as a man who's
seen a good deal of the world

HELEN And what is your opinion, Major Spanner?

WILLIAM (*stiffly*) That that little girl—Rosemary—is worth ten of
him—yes, ten of him Taxi! Ah, got it This one, I think

They step off rostrum and exit

*Lights dim and music begins with final theme of the Act Curtains
open to reveal inner stage set as balcony of hotel in Southern
Europe Moonlight spot comes on Back of scene is dimly lit,
large bedroom window PAUL in a dressing gown and ROSEMARY
in a wrap come out of the long windows, stand close together,
looking out into what is obviously a wonderful moonlight night
The music plays softly before they speak, and continues softly
throughout*

ROSEMARY I feel that you and the night are almost one
I seem as near to you when I stare into the night,
Losing myself in the green ivory world
The moon has carved, as when I felt your heart
Dividing each precious moment with my own!
And when you are so close my eyes have lost you
To my lips, I seem to float in the wide night
And behind my eyelids rises another moon

PAUL (*after a pause*)

Men are restless and nearly always alone,
Going off in pursuit, nosing along a trail,
Following a rumour of gold to the waterless hills
Now here comes to an end for me many a trail
That never had a thought in it of women and love
Now there is nothing I wish to find

He puts his arms round her

ROSEMARY There should be words that ring our joy like bells,
But I know none There is sorrow in all words

PAUL If my heart still drums it is to stop my ears,
Because even to-night from somewhere beyond the
moon

Still roars into the abyss the cataract of time

ROSEMARY Then take hold of this night and keep it fast
Never, never forget it

PAUL I shall not forget

*He holds her against him, and she leans her head against his
shoulder HELEN enters dressed as herself*

HELEN (*in happy excitement*)

Now I'm a woman too, and not a mere voice,
And blast all supercilious commentating
Come on, give me that Mediterranean moon,
And the right man, and I too can kiss
And rave the very stars out of the blue

Moonlight comes full on her too now She calls sharply

William, you idiot!

Then in soft cajoling tone

Oh, Bill, my sweet, come on!

WILLIAM enters as himself again

WILLIAM (*in fine form*) And here I am Hey—spill that moonshine!
Spill it and spread it, boys Ah, that's better

With moonlight full on him, he looks across at HELEN

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God, what a night! And Helen—what a girl

HELEN You fat, conceited and adorable fool You've Paul and Rosemary to thank for this

WILLIAM (*grandly*) And Adam and Eve and the angel who sometimes nods

HELEN And lets us slip under his sword at Eden's Gate

Music, pause

PAUL Rosemary!

ROSEMARY Paul!

Music, pause

JOYCE Philip!

PHILIP Joyce!

Music, pause

HELEN (*the light spreading to them*) William!

Music, pause

WILLIAM Helen!

They crash into triumphant music PAUL and ROSEMARY are close together HELEN and WILLIAM extend their arms to each other PHILIP and JOYCE stare happily across as they play

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

PHILIP and JOYCE begin playing a fairly brisk overture After about a minute and a half of it, however, it begins to flag and suddenly JOYCE stops altogether and looks angry After plodding a bar or two by himself, PHILIP also stops JOYCE rises

PHILIP What's the matter?

JOYCE (*angrily*) You know very well what's the matter

PHILIP I don't

JOYCE Of course you do

PHILIP (*annoyed now*) I tell you I don't All I know is that you suddenly stopped playing

JOYCE And I stopped playing because I couldn't stand it any longer

PHILIP Couldn't stand what?

JOYCE Couldn't stand the sight of you there, obviously with no interest whatever in what we were playing, just bored and not making any effort to hide it I suppose if it had been Margery Walker you'd been playing with, your eyes would have been half out of your head and you'd have been bouncing all over your piano

PHILIP (*with irritating air of patience, rises*) Would you mind telling me what on earth Margery Walker has to do with it?

JOYCE Oh—don't be so pompous!

PHILIP (*with same manner*) I'm not being pompous I'm merely asking a reasonable question What has——

JOYCE (*furiously*) Oh—shut up!

PHILIP (*with injured dignity, sits*) Certainly Certainly Only too delighted

He brings out of his far pocket a copy of a newspaper and very ostentatiously leans back and buries himself behind it

JOYCE (*after a moment*) How you can sit there—pretending to read a newspaper——!

PHILIP (*with irritating air of calm*) I'm not pretending to read I *am* reading I notice here, for instance, that a man called Worsnop has just found on his estate several Roman coins The coins, it says, were in an excellent state of——

JOYCE I haven't the least desire to hear anything about your ridiculous coins

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She goes back to her piano and sits

PHILIP Thank you!

He begins reading again She looks across at him in angry despair WILLIAM now enters smoking a pipe and carrying a copy of The Times He looks rather grumpy JOYCE brightens up at the sight of him

JOYCE Hello, William!

WILLIAM (*not interested*) Hello!

JOYCE (*with forced brightness*) Any news?

WILLIAM (*beginning to open paper*) I haven't really looked at the paper yet

JOYCE I don't mean in the paper I mean, have you any news?

WILLIAM (*blankly*) Me? Oh—no—nothing at all

He sits and begins reading his paper JOYCE looks in despair from him to PHILIP and then plays several hideously-sounding chords WILLIAM and PHILIP together appear from behind their papers and look at her with silent reproach They begin reading again HELEN enters, briskly and cheerfully

HELEN (*crossing over to WILLIAM*) William!

WILLIAM (*looking up without interest*) Yes, my pet?

HELEN (*rather like a guide-lecturer*) Pay attention Now, we're going forward several years in the history of Paul and Rosemary Last time we saw them, you remember, they were on their honeymoon Five or six years have passed since then Rosemary has had a baby, now a very nice little boy between three and four, called Robin

PHILIP He doesn't come into this, does he? I mean, you don't show us little Robin bringing his parents together again in the end, do you?

HELEN (*severely*) No, of course not You see that sort of thing at the films, not here

PHILIP Yes, dear, I know, but when you said they now had a nice little boy, I began to be worried

HELEN You needn't worry And by the way, I'm not really talking to you, I'm talking to William

WILLIAM (*looking up blankly from paper*) Yes, my love, I'm listening

HELEN Move your chair round a bit or you won't see anything

WILLIAM Certainly, certainly (*Moves his stool behind piano, preparing to read again*)

HELEN So now, after missing these first years of marriage, we now

find Paul and Rosemary comfortably settled in London And here is an average evening

Curtains open to disclose inner set, as corner of a sitting-room PAUL is buried in the evening paper, while ROSEMARY is fidgeting between writing a letter, doing a little sewing and reading a book Both are rather more mature than when we saw them last WILLIAM and PHILIP are also reading their newspapers and pay no attention whatever to the scene, to the disgust of HELEN and JOYCE

ROSEMARY (after pause) I saw Diana Ferguson this morning

PAUL (muttering) Don't know her

ROSEMARY Yes, you do know her She says she's expecting her husband back from India at the end of the month

PAUL merely grunts *She looks at him in disgust, then tries again*

ROSEMARY They're taking a house in South Devon for his leave Then she wants to go back with him this time And I must say I don't blame her Do you? (Pause *Waits for a reply and doesn't receive one, keeping her temper with some difficulty*) Is there anything particularly interesting in that paper, dear?

PAUL (blankly, looking up) What?—no

Curtains close

HELEN now notices that WILLIAM is not looking at all

HELEN William, you're the limit!

She goes over to him and snatches the paper away from him He stares at her in blank astonishment

WILLIAM Now don't be silly, Helen I'm reading that paper

HELEN You were, but now you've stopped I don't believe you noticed Paul and Rosemary at all, did you?

WILLIAM Well, I'll tell you——

HELEN Did you?

WILLIAM No, I didn't

HELEN You were too busy staring at that newspaper What's in it

WILLIAM Nothing Absolutely nothing to-day Very dull

HELEN I take the trouble to show you Paul and Rosemary having a typical evening——

WILLIAM (warming as he goes along) Yes, yes, but I don't want to see them Let's leave them alone That's what's the matter with the world now Everybody interfering with everybody else Everybody wanting to know what everybody else is doing and saying and thinking Nobody's left alone Not for a single half-hour is anybody left

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alone Well, I say, leave them alone Refuse to indulge in this universal idiotic and shameless curiosity Just hand me my paper, will you?

HELEN Why? It's only crammed with information about other people, news of somebody else's business, all arranged (*hands paper, which she has crumpled, back to WILLIAM*) to satisfy an idiotic and shameless curiosity

WILLIAM (*with cold dignity and folding his newspaper*) It's one thing to acquaint yourself with what is happening in the world and quite another thing to poke your nose into other people's private affairs However, if you won't see it, you won't (*Change of tone*) Now, I suppose you want me to have a look at this pair of yours, several years after marriage, just to show me how dissatisfied she is

HELEN If you'd seen and heard—

WILLIAM I saw and heard enough She's not really dissatisfied with him—although she thinks she is—but she's dissatisfied because she can't have her cake and eat it—

HELEN (*cutting in, vehemently*) If there's one thing I loathe it's that bit of misery about not being able to have your cake and eat it

PHILIP You all do

WILLIAM Yes So she'll begin taking her dissatisfaction out of him And it's not his fault

HELEN and JOYCE Of course it is

HELEN Just stuck there, with his head in the paper

WILLIAM But he has to read the paper some time and probably it happens that's he's been busy all day

HELEN And probably not But that's not the point The point is he's beginning to treat her as if she weren't really there All she wants is a little politeness, a little interest, a—

WILLIAM (*cutting in coolly, puts pipe in his mouth and newspaper under his arm*) I know what she'd like Now I'll show you (*He claps his hands*)

Curtains open to same scene as before

ROSEMARY (*sitting eating chocolates*) I saw Diana Ferguson this morning

PAUL (*putting aside paper at once*) Did you, darling? When's her husband coming on leave from India?

ROSEMARY At the end of the month.

PAUL (*brightly astonished*) No!

ROSEMARY Yes She's awfully excited

PAUL Of course He must be too I know *I'd* be almost off my head with excitement if we'd been separated so long They ought to take a furnished house somewhere for his leave

ROSEMARY (*triumphantly*) That's just what they have done In South Devon

PAUL In South Devon? Oh, they ought to have a grand time there I know we should (*They lean to each other and smile*)

ROSEMARY She wants to go back with him this time And I must say I don't blame her Do you?

PAUL No, I don't Just imagine if it were us How lucky we are to be able to be together without either of us making any sacrifices (*Blows kiss to her*)

ROSEMARY Yes, darling (*After smiling at him*) But I'm keeping you from your newspaper

PAUL Oh no (*Throws newspaper over his shoulder*) I'd much rather have a good talk about us, and especially about you (*Leans forward, regarding her lovingly and kisses her*)

Curtains close

WILLIAM And that's quite enough of that Now, Helen, that's what she'd like—or what she thinks she'd like, and, honestly, what do you think of it?

HELEN I've always tried to be honest with you, Bill, haven't I?

WILLIAM Except when we're quarrelling—yes

HELEN So, I'll admit that for an ordinary conversation—not a special occasion, mind you, making it up or celebrating an anniversary——

WILLIAM No, no—an ordinary conversation at the conjugal hearth

HELEN It did strike me as being a wee bit fatuous and sickly

WILLIAM Exactly Like sitting down after dinner and eating two pounds of chocolate creams

HELEN But it isn't the absence of that stuff that is making her feel dissatisfied What she feels is that he's beginning to be bored with her

WILLIAM Now why? A man comes home tired at the end of a hard day, and naturally he wants to take it easy and——

HELEN Yes, yes, we know all about that, and even women can understand it, seeing that they often have even harder days and aren't allowed to take it easy and sprawl and yawn in everybody's face But what infuriates a wife is this sort of thing

HELEN *exits*

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WILLIAM What sort of thing?

JOYCE Watch and you'll see, William

Curtains open to same scene ROSEMARY is reading a book this time

ROSEMARY And I must say I don't blame her Do you? (*Pause as before*) Is there anything particularly interesting in that paper, dear?

PAUL (*looking up blankly*) What? No (*Half stifles a yawn and returns to reading*)

ROSEMARY (*after another pause*) Did anything amusing happen at the office to-day, Paul?

PAUL (*indifferently*) No, can't remember anything

She looks at him despairingly but he doesn't even see it After another pause, to establish atmosphere of boredom, HELEN marches in, looking very trim and gay

HELEN (*briskly*) Hello, Rosemary 'Lo, Paul! Just looked in to ask you about Saturday

PAUL Saturday by all means, Helen By the way, a most amusing thing happened at the office this morning We've got a new client, a Mrs Dowson, who's actually very rich, but looks a queer, shabby old thing We've also got a new charlady whose name happens to be Mrs Rowston (*Laughs*) Well, this morning this Mrs Rowston comes in for the first time, and of course the clerk thinks the name she gives is Mrs Dowson, treats her with enormous politeness, can't understand why she keeps mumbling something about cleaning and keeps apologising abjectly because my partner and I aren't about

He laughs, so does HELEN ROSEMARY does not laugh

HELEN (*clearly forcing her appreciation*) What a priceless thing to happen!

ROSEMARY It doesn't amuse me very much, somehow The only difference between the two women was that one had a lot of money and the other hadn't any And I don't think that's funny

PAUL Oh—nonsense, Rosemary (*Pats her on the shoulder*) That's taking it altogether too seriously

HELEN Did you read that extraordinary case of the woman who had two flats and lived a completely different life in them?

PAUL (*eagerly*) Yes I was just reading about it now Fascinating business I don't think she was mad though, do you?

HELEN No I believe there was a man in it somewhere

ROSEMARY Where is this woman?

HELEN In all the papers to-day

ROSEMARY (*to PAUL*) And you said there wasn't anything interesting in the paper you were reading

HELEN (*in ordinary tone*) All right, Rosemary, I think that's enough. You see, that's what I mean. If a man's tired, all right, let him be tired. It's a bit dull for wives, who've been messing about at home all day, if husbands come back in the evening fit for nothing but sprawling and yawning.

ROSEMARY But we'll make the best of it so long as they *are* genuinely tired, and not simply bored. But you saw what happened. As soon as another woman, an attractive woman, of course, came in, he was up and sparkling, trying to be amusing, ready to show off as hard as he could—

PAUL I really can't see that just because I show a little ordinary politeness to a friend—a friend of yours as well as mine—you should work yourself up into a jealous fury.

ROSEMARY I wasn't jealous, and it just shows how stupid you are to imagine I was. I was annoyed because you could take the trouble to entertain Helen when you'd just proved very plainly you couldn't be bothered to entertain me.

WILLIAM (*whistles and beckons them up to him*) I see the point.

HELEN He sees the point. (*To audience*) We're getting on.

WILLIAM (*turning to PHILIP*) But after all, when somebody calls, you have to exert yourself a little, for the sake of ordinary social decency—

PHILIP And I agree— (*He breaks off because both women are shaking their heads*)

ROSEMARY I must say, William, I expected something better than that from *you*—

PAUL (*butterfly*) Not from *me*, of course, being only your husband.

WILLIAM "A wife", said Dostoevsky, after covering himself with glory at a shooting gallery, when his wife had been angry with him for trying to shoot at all—"A wife," he observed profoundly, "is the natural enemy of her husband."

PAUL And I know exactly what he means.

PHILIP So do I and I wish I didn't.

HELEN And I never heard anything more ridiculous. I'm surprised at you, William.

ROSEMARY So am I.

JOYCE I thought he was intelligent.

WILLIAM I am intelligent and so was Dostoevsky.

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ROSEMARY (*bitterly*) The point is, having another woman there he was no longer bored

HELEN Perfectly obvious and perfectly maddening

JOYCE (*rising*) Haven't we all seen it over and over again?

PHILIP (*also rising angrily*) Because you're so childish You want everything at once

PAUL You can't have it both ways

WILLIAM You can't have your cake and eat it

JOYCE (*angrily*) Oh—stop talking rot!

ROSEMARY (*angrily*) What can't we have both ways?

HELEN (*angrily*) Oh—don't begin about that cake

The men all laugh together at this The women have all spoken at once, they give each other apologetic little smiles and apologise profusely to each other Then glare at the men The women have drifted back and grouped themselves round the piano left The men begin speaking at once

PHILIP It's perfectly simple and I'll explain

PAUL What I mean by not having it both ways is——

WILLIAM Wanting to have your cake and eat it means this——

The women all laugh as the men did at this The men stop and apologise in a hearty, masculine style to each other

PHILIP Sorry, old man! You were going to say——?

PAUL Not at all, old boy My fault Interrupted you both

The men group themselves round and lean against piano right, they remain in a huddle

WILLIAM That's all right, my dear fellow You go ahead

JOYCE (*in dry, hard tone*) Lord help us! When you take a good cool look at them, you wonder why you ever bother They're so damned idiotic (*Savagely burlesquing them*) No, not at all, old man Go on, old boy Urr!

PHILIP One of us had better speak for the lot

WILLIAM Good idea! What about you, Paul?

PAUL No, you're the chap, William Your job, old boy

WILLIAM (*muttering*) All right, old boy

HELEN (*coolly*) They're like schoolboys who've been allowed to sit up late and guzzle and swill as much as they liked and so have all gone to seed

ROSEMARY They don't even try—as we do—to keep young outside while letting themselves grow older inside

HELEN Just overgrown, sagging, ruined schoolboys

WILLIAM (*rising slowly*) Ladies, after we have fallen in love with you we feel that existence would be intolerable if you are not by our sides, so we marry you What happens then?

ROSEMARY You take us for granted and are bored

WILLIAM That is how you see it, but not how we see it

PHILIP and PAUL Hear, hear!

WILLIAM You are now associated in our minds with *Home*, with relaxation, with slippers and ease, with all the cosy humdrum of domestic life, with lazy chit-chat—

JOYCE (*bitterly*) And sprawling and yawning

WILLIAM If necessary, yes, with sprawling and yawning With you we feel we need no longer pretend, for we are at home. There is something in most women, however, that feels itself defeated by the ease and familiarity of marriage (*He stands on stool and assumes the air and deportment of a political speaker*) It is not that you dislike the cosy domesticity, the slippers and dressing-gown atmosphere But at any moment when you feel so inclined you think you are entitled to be regarded as a person clean outside this atmosphere, a strange, exciting creature, a figure of romance

ROSEMARY (*pointing to WILLIAM*) But that's the point We are strange, exciting creatures and what's wrong with you men is that you stop thinking we are, and then you diminish us We grow angry because there is a light in us and you will no longer let it shine for you

She returns to the piano

PAUL But the light has been turned into the domestic lamp and firelight Your trouble is you want to be courted as well as married

HELEN And why not?

WILLIAM Because—and this is one of the cakes you can't both have and eat—to our way of thinking one relationship cancels out the other Husbands take wives for granted Of course they do They married them in order to take them for granted But wives take husbands for granted just as much, and that, ladies and gentlemen, is our case

WILLIAM *drops off stool* PHILIP *shakes him by the hand*, PAUL *does the same* They go into a huddle round the piano again

ROSEMARY It doesn't suit women to be taken for granted (*Stamps her foot*) It withers them

JOYCE *sits at the piano and plays a few mournful chords*

HELEN What's that?

JOYCE It's the beginning of a lament for women

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JOYCE *plays very softly throughout women's speeches*

HELEN (*grouped near JOYCE with ROSEMARY*) Who was the last to enter the Paradise of Eden—and the first out?

ROSEMARY The fool who can light up at a single kind word and bleed at a glance

JOYCE Who buys a new hat and hopes against hope

HELEN (*in a grander style and going up on to centre of rostrum*) I sing—after the manner of Walt Whitman, who nevertheless, has always seemed to me an insufferable old bore—I chant the theme Woman Not Woman and the joys of the open road, for no woman ever had an open road All roads are narrow, dark, bristling and dangerous to a woman Not Woman and the happiness of loafing, hanging about, watching other people work and producing nothing but noble platitudes, because no woman is allowed—by herself or by anybody else—to indulge in such idle antics

Some men are handsomely paid and kept in comfort to prove and preach that the ultimate force in the universe is nothing but Love, and they may or may not believe it But all women, even the stupidest and ugliest that nobody cares about, act as if this were true (*Comes down to piano and leans against it*) And much good it does them

ROSEMARY It is terrible to be a woman and know in your heart how dependent you are upon other people, how you wait and wait for some fool of a man, who doesn't happen to have anything better to do, to bring you completely to life

JOYCE There are too many of us, that's the trouble

ROSEMARY A hurried, indifferent kiss, a hint of a yawn, from some man who isn't really very different from millions of other men, and ice is packed round your heart

JOYCE What we need is ice packed round our heads (*Finish of music*)

HELEN After being a woman, to be a man must be like having a long rest, a sort of convalescence—

PHILIP *slides into piano chair and interrupts with some loud, sharp chords while the women look at him*

PHILIP (*piano silent*) Convalescence! You can't imagine what it's like being a man It's like this (*Plays some loud, restless, strident music*) I tell you—it's hell (*Plays softly now, but with loud chords between speeches*)

WILLIAM In the fields you see the cows staring at nothing with their great soft eyes, placidly grazing and chewing, cosily manufacturing to-morrow's milk Look further, into some lonely field or dark shed, and you will hear unhappy snorts and grunts and see a

majestic but restless form, a creature passionate and bewildered, with a ring through his nose (*Pause*) The Bull! And that is Man

PAUL (*quick leap on to rostrum*) Man, fixed for ever in his terrible dualism, the war between the spirit and the senses that no woman can understand Man who grasps at the moon, and finds himself eating green cheese Man, who cannot be lulled by the rhythms of the fat earth and who is haunted by the Paradise you hardly remember

PHILIP (*sadly*) After all, it is better to buy a hat and hope a bit than to buy dozens of drinks and know there is no hope

WILLIAM When a pair of lovers declare themselves, one of them thinks he is juggling with the sun, moon and stars, while the other is busy working out how much it will cost to keep a housemaid in one of those nice new bungalows along Elm Avenue It is safe to prophesy which one of these two will come a cropper first The chaps who saw themselves keeping the sun, moon and stars going are bound to come down with a bump The ladies—God bless them—have never left the ground

PAUL Man—alternating between Don Quixote and Don Juan——

PHILIP *points to WILLIAM indicating that the women are not listening*

WILLIAM (*to PAUL*) I don't think they're listening, my dear fellow Better get back on the job

PAUL What? Oh, yes, certainly (*He goes back into the inner stage, sits in arm-chair*)

WILLIAM (*crossing to HELEN and ROSEMARY*) Come along, you two Never should have stepped out of the scene like that y'know Spoils the illusion.

HELEN and ROSEMARY *go up on rostrum, take up their former positions*

HELEN I'll just say good-bye to you both, and then you show how annoyed you are with him, and we'll carry on from there

Well, I must run along, children Oh—what about Saturday? (*HELEN and PAUL rise*)

ROSEMARY (*coldly*) Paul can go if he likes—but I'm sorry—I can't

PAUL But you said——

ROSEMARY I promised to spend the afternoon with Father You go I'm sure you'll find it very amusing

HELEN Settle it between you and give me a ring, one of you, in the morning 'Bye, darling

ROSEMARY Good-bye, Helen

PAUL I'll see you out

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PAUL *goes out with HELEN* ROSEMARY *now looks furious, takes up her book and hurls it down in chair*

ROSEMARY (*muttering angrily*) Oh! damn—damn—damn!

These get softer as she drops into chair PAUL *enters and offers her cigarette box*

PAUL (*with forced cheerfulness*) Cigarette, darling?

ROSEMARY (*very cold and distant*) No, thank you

PAUL Anything the matter?

ROSEMARY No, why should there be?

PAUL I dunno—I just wondered I thought you were very keen on going with them on Saturday

ROSEMARY (*miles away*) Did you?

PAUL Well, you said you were

ROSEMARY I haven't the least desire to go with them I loathe the Sunderlands anyhow I've always thought your friend Helen had a very queer taste in people

PAUL (*raising his eyebrows*) My friend Helen now, eh—?

She does not reply

She used to be your friend too In fact you knew her before I did

ROSEMARY I only knew her through William And I *adore* William I don't dislike Helen, but I think she has some very queer friends and I'd just as soon she didn't bounce in and out like that, even if you have to make such a fuss of her

PAUL (*very innocently*) Fuss of her! What fuss did I make of her?

ROSEMARY If you join them on Saturday, you'll be able to have a whole day of it, with funny stories about charwomen and women who live in two flats at once and everything

PAUL Look here, I didn't care tuppence about Saturday but if you insist upon taking that tone about it, all right, I *am* going

ROSEMARY I should It'll be a nice change for you after being so bored at home

PAUL (*angry now*) Now when have I ever said I was bored at home?

ROSEMARY You didn't need to *say* anything

PAUL Well, what have I done then? What's the matter?

ROSEMARY (*stormily*) Nothing (*Close to tears*) Everything

She goes out, we hear loud door-slam Curtains close

HELEN Well, there they are then

WILLIAM Yes, and I was working out their future. I see three stages waiting for them First, a stage of constant and bitter quarrel-

ling Secondly, a stage in which each seeks satisfaction elsewhere
Thirdly, a stage of final separation or a real reconciliation and the beginning of a decent adult life together

HELEN Very good, darling I couldn't have done it better myself

WILLIAM You couldn't have done it as well as I did

HELEN Yes I could Actually, you've left out a stage You see, with some couples like Paul and Rosemary, there's another stage that comes before the constant quarrelling, in this period each partner finds a friend of the same sex that the other partner very much dislikes It might be called the Unwise Friendship Stage

WILLIAM You're right (*To audience*) She is right, y'know Very clever woman Most men, especially Englishmen, dislike clever women, but I like 'em So long as they're reasonably good-tempered, of course (*Pause*) An *amiable* clever woman is an absolute treasure (*WILLIAM takes her hand, brings her downstage*) Thank you You've probably been wondering what our relationship is—haven't you? It's very interesting And perhaps later on—well, we'll see (*To HELEN*) You're dead right, of course

HELEN Rosemary will suddenly become friendly with some terrible woman whom Paul can't stand

WILLIAM And Paul will pick up a pal who's poison to Rosemary

HELEN It seems accidental—and yet—I don't know——

WILLIAM The subconscious does it, I think It deliberately singles out the type that the other partner loathes (*Pause*) Well, it's up to us, I suppose

HELEN Certainly What are you going to be?

WILLIAM I shall be one of those self-made City bachelors They're always dining in very expensive restaurants and they put up the money for bad musical comedies Wives hate them, because they imagine that these fellows have flats somewhere crowded with show-girls drinking champagne-cocktails and playing strip poker

HELEN (*interested*) And have they?

WILLIAM No, it's all an illusion Nevertheless, the instinct of the wives is right, because these chaps are fundamentally anti-domestic and try to turn the husbands back into bachelors That's me, then And what about you?

HELEN I shall be Mrs Ambergate—Gloria Ambergate I'm separated from my husband—he probably cleared out with his typist—and now I've got a down on all husbands and am very very sorry for the poor wives And she's gone in for New Thought and Higher Thought and Astral Planes and Auras and Vibrations and she sees

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everybody's personality in terms of colour And she has a general deep soulfulness from which the coarse scoffing male is excluded

WILLIAM I know the type But Rosemary would never put up with her

HELEN Oh yes, she would—for a time Just because she was sorry for her It often happens among women Being members of the gentler and more sympathetic sex——

WILLIAM (*astonished*) Members of the what?

HELEN (*shouting*) The more sympathetic sex—idiot

WILLIAM Yes, I see Well, that's us, then

HELEN (*to the pianists*) And you two ought to find Leitmotifs for——

WILLIAM Jimmy Mowbray

HELEN Gloria Ambergate

HELEN and WILLIAM *exit*

PHILIP Oh, I've got mine (*Pause*) This is Jimmy Mowbray (*He plays snatch of cheerful, rather vulgar dance tune*)

JOYCE And this is Gloria Ambergate (*Plays a snatch of cheaply "soulful" music*)

PHILIP Good Now we can make 'em into something Short prelude to Scene illustrating this stage of Unwise Friendships

JOYCE Alternative title What on earth Do you See in Him—or Her?

Finish of music they bow to each other Curtains open to show same set PAUL enters with tray with cocktail shaker and glasses Telephone rings, which PAUL answers in dumb show during last bars of music

PAUL (*as music ends*) Ha, ha, ha Of course it's not too early Come along at once, all right then Good-bye for now

ROSEMARY *enters and sits with a book*

Will you have—er—have a cocktail?

ROSEMARY No thank you You know I hardly ever have a cocktail I think it's an awful waste making them And why *three* glasses? (*She opens book*)

PAUL (*uncomfortably*) Well—as a matter of fact—Jimmy Mowbray rang up to say he might look in

ROSEMARY (*disgusted*) What again? He'd better come and live here, hadn't he?

PAUL (*with great dignity*) Mowbray happens to be a client of mine

ROSEMARY That has nothing to do with it, and you know it hasn't And what you can see in him I can't imagine

PAUL Oh—he's not a bad fellow

ROSEMARY He's *terrible* And Sybil Stinnes says he has a flat crowded with chorus girls all drinking champagne-cocktails Really, Paul, I thought you'd better taste than that

PAUL (*irritably*) Oh—don't be so snobbish Jimmy Mowbray may not be your type—

ROSEMARY My type! He's not anybody's type outside a race-course and non-stop variety He's—

PAUL (*cutting in sharply*) Jimmy Mowbray's quite a decent, amusing sort of fellow—who might turn out to be a very good client—

ROSEMARY And then again might not I wouldn't trust a man like that a yard Still, I suppose if he wants to turn this house into his cocktail-bar I mustn't complain

PAUL (*unpleasantly*) Oh—you couldn't complain You wouldn't know how to

ROSEMARY Thank you (*Giving him a wounded stare*)

ROSEMARY goes to telephone and begins dialling JOYCE plays *Ambergate* theme softly ROSEMARY speaks into telephone with marked sweetness PAUL sits and picks up paper from table, begins to read it

ROSEMARY Oh—is that you Gloria? Rosemary Yes, I suppose it might be telepathy

PAUL looks across and snorts

No, Gloria, you come here

PAUL throws paper down on table

Yes, as soon as you like Good (*Puts down telephone*)

PAUL (*glaring at her*) Was that your dear friend Gloria Ambergate?

ROSEMARY Yes She's coming across to spend the evening here

PAUL (*angrily*) If that awful woman comes here, I'm going straight out

ROSEMARY (*with mock innocent air*) I thought you were probably going out anyhow, with your nice friend Mr Mowbray Weren't you?

PAUL (*rather confusedly*) He suggested our dining somewhere—but I hadn't said definitely I would

ROSEMARY (*same tone as before*) Well, now you can, and that'll be very nice for you.

PAUL I warned you before If you must see that frightful half-baked woman—and what on earth you can see in her beats me—please don't ask her here when I'm about I *loathe* the woman

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Really, I'm surprised at you, Rosemary A year or two ago, you couldn't have spent an hour with a woman like that, and now——

ROSEMARY (*vehemently*) Yes, *now*—when I have to watch you being dragged off every other night by that—that——

Sharp ring of bell off PAUL rises and hurries out ROSEMARY glares after him, then hastily takes up shaker and smells it in disgust, then hastily puts it down and assumes an air of distant dignity WILLIAM enters as Mowbray

WILLIAM (*who has entered laughing*) Ah! Good evening, Mrs Weybridge

ROSEMARY (*coldly*) Good evening

WILLIAM Wonder if I might snatch your husband—dine with me to meet another friend just back from South America—just the kind of bloke to amuse Paul Quiet bachelor evening Steak and a decent bottle o' wine, y'know—an' perhaps finish our cigars at a variety show

PAUL (*who has been pouring out drinks*) Cocktails? Rosemary?

ROSEMARY (*distantly*) No thank you

PAUL (*handing one over*) Mowbray?

WILLIAM (*taking it*) Ta! Well, down the hatch!

PAUL Dry enough for you?

WILLIAM Oh, yes Do with a dash p'r'haps, Like a dash myself

PAUL Ah—sorry about that

ROSEMARY (*distantly*) And what is a dash?

WILLIAM Dash? Don't you know what a dash is? Where have you been? It's absinthe

ROSEMARY (*condemning it*) Oh—absinthe

WILLIAM (*not noticing her attitude*) That's it Absinthe makes the heart grow fonder, eh? (*Guffaws*) Well, I won't say No to another, old boy

PAUL *pours out another drink*

Had a hard day to-day Market's all over the place Still, never say die (*Gives ROSEMARY a hearty pat on the back*) Met a bloke at lunch to-day who's bringing that musical show over from New York—and blow the expense (*takes drink from PAUL*)—y'know the big smash hit there—*Got What It Takes* or something Says if he can sneak most of it past the Lord Chamberlain, it'll make London's hair stand on end He's importing all the original girls (*Nudging PAUL with elbow*)

ROSEMARY (*coldly*) I would have thought we'd enough chorus girls here without bringing some all the way from New York

WILLIAM That's just your innocence, Mrs Weybridge These American kids have got something Ask your husband Well, down the hatch

Another sharp ring at bell PAUL *makes as if to go but* ROSEMARY *rises and goes herself*

PAUL (*dropping his voice*) We'd better push off in a minute, Jimmy This woman's terrible

WILLIAM What woman?

PAUL You'll see

WILLIAM Isn't time for it now, but remind me when we get out to tell you the story of the widow and the piano tuner It'll kill you By the way, this bloke you're going to meet—like most of these lads just back from the pampas or whatever they are—is a bit hot and might want to start a pretty thick sort of evening Have to sit on his head a bit You don't want any young female society to-night, do you?

PAUL No, definitely not

WILLIAM Same here Last week-end was bad enough and I've a business to look after (*Takes another drink which PAUL has poured out*)

HELEN *enters as Gloria Ambergate, followed by ROSEMARY*
HELEN *contrives to register her disapproval of the two men and the cocktails at once*

PAUL Oh—good evening, Mrs Ambergate

HELEN How d'you do?

ROSEMARY Gloria—this is Mr Mowbray

WILLIAM How d'you do?

HELEN (*coldly*) Good evening

PAUL Cocktail, Mrs Ambergate?

HELEN (*sitting*) Oh—no, thank you I can't take alcohol in any form

WILLIAM (*taking drink offered by PAUL to HELEN*) Can't you? It's about the only thing I can take nowadays (*Laughs*) Well, Weybridge, better push off, eh?

PAUL I'm ready (*Drinks up and puts glasses on table*)

WILLIAM Well, the skin off your nose (*Drinking to HELEN*) Good night, Mrs Weybridge

WILLIAM *exits.*

ROSEMARY Don't be too late, Paul

PAUL No, I won't be 'Night Mrs Ambergate

HELEN That man, Rosemary—who is he?

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ROSEMARY He's a client of Paul's You can say what you like about him I loathe him

HELEN I'm so glad, dear I was sure you must He's a dreadfully undeveloped type *Earthy*—quite earthy With a muddy brown aura I wish you could have been at our lecture last Wednesday Mme Rubbishky gave us a *wonderful* talk on I AM THE GREAT ALL—

ROSEMARY On what?

HELEN (*solemnly*) I AM THE GREAT ALL And so *profound*—so *stimulating* and yet at the same time so essentially *simple* We are all of us the Great All And the Great All is all of us The whole *thing* was there

ROSEMARY I'm not sure I believe in all this, you know

HELEN I didn't expect you would, dear, not yet Perception comes with suffering and loneliness of spirit You'll see

ROSEMARY (*dismayed*) But I don't want any suffering and loneliness of spirit

HELEN It won't be so bad for you, dear, as it was for me You'll have friends—certainly *one* friend, darling—who can help and guide As soon as I saw that man here to-night, and saw him taking your husband away, I knew at once that soon you'll need a friend very badly I could *feel* a downward, earthward influence—

ROSEMARY But what kind of influence is that, Gloria?

HELEN It's downward—earthward, dear—pulling down I've always been able to feel it, even before I knew what it meant Chiefly among men, of course And I've always *known* it was antagonistic But I myself rejected the influence I said "You cannot pull me down, I am *all* spirit", I said —And, of course, I was

PHILIP I say, Helen, is there much more of this horrible stuff?

HELEN (*in ordinary tone*) Yes, Philip Hours and hours

PHILIP Then let's cut to midnight Lights!

Lights black-out Clock chimes twelve As lights go on again

ROSEMARY *is discovered slumped down in her chair, half asleep, and HELEN lying on the floor with her head on a chair*

HELEN . And four Hindu disciples living in the spare room Good gracious—twelve o'clock already We've had such a wonderful lovely satisfying talk, it's just given the evening great golden wings—and—pouf—it's just flown away (*She rises, ROSEMARY giving her a helping hand*)

ROSEMARY (*stifling a yawn*) Yes, hasn't it?

HELEN (*solemnly*) But I do hope nothing has happened to your husband, dear

ROSEMARY Of course not Why should it? Just a moment, I'll put the light on (*Exits*)

HELEN (*moving to door*) It's all very well saying, of course not, my dear But I can't forget the night I was sitting up late with poor Mildred Fothergill We heard the ambulance ringing right outside her window, and the telephone went and a voice said, "Come at once, Mrs Fothergill" But, of course, it was all over by the time she got to the hospital Mr Fothergill had departed for the Astral Sphere, and had not even insured himself properly

Lights on the stage black-out and come up to Full again We hear the clock strike one o'clock ROSEMARY has now changed into a dressing-gown to indicate time lapse She enters, goes to window and looks out She seems agitated, now moves to table and is about to pick up telephone but decides not to Just as she is about to sit down the telephone rings urgently

ROSEMARY (*rushing to telephone*) Yes, yes ? (*Then sharply*) No, we're not Well, I ought to know whether we're the gasworks or not You've got the wrong number, that's all (*As she puts down the receiver, she mutters to herself*) Silly idiot

An ambulance bell now rings furiously This disturbs ROSEMARY and she moves restlessly about the stage

Enter WILLIAM from alcove

WILLIAM What's the matter with her?

JOYCE Paul's late, so now her imagination will get to work We all do it

ROSEMARY (*lights fade and ROSEMARY picked out in a single pink spot*) the hospital, please driver—and hurry—it's terribly urgent—yes, nurse, I'm Mrs Weybridge, take me to him—oh!—yes, I'll be brave—I will be brave (*Then in worrying tone like that in Act One*) I'd have to ask Father to come up to look after things—and I couldn't let Robin stay here—perhaps he and Nannie could go to Alice's for the week—and as soon as I'd got them off I'd have to order my black—and then when it was all over I couldn't afford to stay on here—I'd have to sell this house—then try to find a little cottage in the country—and then Robin would have to go away to school—but we'd share our little cottage during all his holidays (*Sighing very dreamily now*) Yes, dear, it's years ago now, and they realise that my Paul was a great architect—and they want me to unveil a memorial to him—it will be a beautiful experience but, of course, sad too (*The lights begin to come now, ROSEMARY moves upstage to sit down She is dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief*) •

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We hear PAUL outside, he is whistling the Mowbray theme, but she does not hear him He enters

ROSEMARY (*with joy and surprise*) Paul! (*Rising*)

PAUL I'm sorry, my dear You shouldn't have waited up——

ROSEMARY (*severely*) Where have you been?

WILLIAM The eternal question (*Pause*) And now I understand why they always put it so angrily

PAUL Mowbray took me to his club—and we began playing snooker—and then I couldn't get a taxi You know how it is, my dear What have you been doing?

ROSEMARY Listening to Gloria for hours and hours——

PAUL (*laughing to himself*) Oh! Bad luck

WILLIAM (*turning to JOYCE*) I wonder if the chump realises this is his chance He's had as much as he wants of Jimmy Mowbray and she's had far more of Gloria Ambergate I wonder if he realises this Oh dear, it doesn't look as if he does

PAUL is pouring himself a glass of whisky from the bottle but this bottle only contains sufficient for one glass, therefore he has tipped the bottle up and is draining it

PAUL (*drinking*) You know very well, Rosemary, that's a terribly dreary woman

ROSEMARY I know—but I'm sorry for her, though I admit she can be an awful bore But she's lonely Not like your friend Jimmy Mowbray, who's so pleased with himself

PAUL Well I'll admit that Jimmy is a bit much at times But Oris Glambergate—is a tearily dreary——

ROSEMARY Paul, I believe you're tight

PAUL (*swaying about and toying with his glass*) If I say I am, you'll believe I'm not, which wouldn't be quite true But if I say I'm not, then you'll think I'm very tight, which would be quite wrong Better ignore the whole thing

WILLIAM Now, what's her reaction going to be? She might burst into tears She might lose her temper and throw something at him She might rise haughtily and sweep out of the room Or she——

ROSEMARY suddenly bursts out laughing It is quite warm and friendly laughter He seems to her, at this moment, very funny

JOYCE (*as ROSEMARY's laughter is quieter*) This is his chance

WILLIAM Of course it is He's only to drop down and put his arms round her and babble any nonsense and she's his again

JOYCE (*scornfully*) But he isn't going to (*Pause*) You men!

WILLIAM (*sadly*) Pompous vanity is our weakness

PAUL (*with foolish dignity*) Glad you're amused

ROSEMARY (*still ready to be reconciled*) Paul, don't be silly

PAUL After spending five hours exchanging idiocies with that woman, you can ask me not to be silly!

ROSEMARY Oh—you are a fool!

Exits We hear door being slammed He stares after her half bewildered, half angry, then stares blankly out front There is a little broken music

WILLIAM Let's hide the poor chump

Curtains close

HELEN *enters from alcove as ordinary self* WILLIAM *takes her arm and brings her downstage*

HELEN We shall have to look at them now, somewhere in the middle of the next stage

WILLIAM (*reflectively*) Now wait a minute Constant quarrelling is bad for both, of course, but I think that in this quarrelling stage the woman is better off than the man

He says no more because HELEN begins straightening his tie, brushing his hair back and generally trying to smarten up his appearance She takes him by left ear and turns him to JOYCE

HELEN And that's supposed to be a clever one Imagine what some of the rest are like!

JOYCE He just doesn't know, dear How could he?

WILLIAM (*severely and rather annoyed*) Instead of indulging in idle antics, I will produce a reason or two for my statement The woman is better off because—first—an emotional outburst, a *scene* is less repugnant to her than it is to the wretched man, who will go to almost any length to avoid one Secondly, the woman has a superior technical equipment and knows instinctively how to put the fellow in the wrong and keep him there, and has a diabolical skill in detecting the weak joints in his armour

HELEN The said armour consisting of solid plates a foot thick of masculine vanity, conceit and self-complacency While the poor woman, her heart thumping away, her tummy tying itself into knots, has no armour and feels completely naked

PHILIP But I thought you liked to feel naked

HELEN (*doing a funny walk*) Five minutes after he has stamped out of the house the man begins to forget about the quarrel, and by the time he has plunged into the day's business it no longer exists for him But the woman lives with the quarrel all day and half the

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night, as if she were wrestling with a giant scorpion She hears the angry voices hour after hour Her whole world looks as if it has been torn into quivering strips by an earthquake The very chemistry of her entire being

WILLIAM (*catching hold of her hand and kissing it*) Yes, yes, yes, my pet An excellent speech How well you do these things We all enjoyed it But I think we ought to be getting along Let's have another look at them

HELEN Here they are then Typical'

Curtains open We now see the same room, but the table has been removed and in its place is a modern desk There is a different picture on the wall, something which suggests the study of an architect PAUL is sitting at his desk and making a few casual notes, he is not working very hard and after a moment or two ROSEMARY, looking rather pale and strained, enters and begins rather elaborately looking for something

ROSEMARY (*after a moment, very politely*) I'm sorry to disturb you

PAUL (*with strained politeness*) No, that's all right Can I——?

ROSEMARY (*still looking vaguely*) No No (*They get weaker*)

She exits and after a moment or two she returns This time she comes to centre, looking as if she has been in the room for hours
You haven't seen my scissors—the large pair—have you?

PAUL (*half rising, very politely*) No, I'm afraid I haven't Can I——?

ROSEMARY (*looking round vaguely*) No No Sorry to disturb you, that's all

PAUL (*sitting down again*) No, that's all right (*Goes on with his work*)

ROSEMARY gives him a sharp contemptuous look and goes out

WILLIAM I don't quite see the point of this dodging in and out

HELEN She's giving him a chance to be human again and to say he's sorry, and then of course she'll say it's all her fault But meeting this heavy politeness, she knows that the quarrel is still on

WILLIAM Why has the man to say he's sorry first? He nearly always has, you know

HELEN Yes, but once he does, the woman is nearly always ready to be downright abject

WILLIAM Quite so But why has he to start the ball rolling?

HELEN It's a kind of tradition with us.

WILLIAM (*pause*) That is very curious

ROSEMARY *enters again and this time stands rather rigidly looking at him*

Back again Different technique this time

HELEN Yes She's still giving him a chance, but now she's hardening rapidly The excuse to talk to him will be a telephone conversation that she's saved up for this moment

ROSEMARY (*in cold, polite tone*) I forgot to tell you that Mona Roberts rang up to ask if we'd dine with them on the fifteenth Do you want to go?

PAUL (*rising slowly and taking off his spectacles*) Not particularly, I think he's rather a bore But—you like her, don't you?

ROSEMARY (*same tone*) Yes, but I can see her some other time It's not essential that you should go and be bored

PAUL No, if you want to go——

ROSEMARY I know how easily you are bored

PAUL (*heavily*) Was that necessary?

ROSEMARY (*furious*) Oh—don't be so pompous

PAUL (*still heavily*) Really, I don't see why I should be accused of being pompous just because I try to be decently polite

ROSEMARY (*cold, contemptuous*) Don't you?

PAUL (*with more warmth*) No, I don't

ROSEMARY Well, what am I to say to them about the fifteenth?

PAUL (*impatiently*) Oh—say what you like What do I care!

ROSEMARY What do you care about anything?

PAUL What does that mean?

ROSEMARY (*contemptuously*) What do you think it means?

PAUL I don't know

ROSEMARY No, of course, *you* wouldn't

PAUL and ROSEMARY *turn their backs to each other* WILLIAM and HELEN *rise* They look at PAUL and ROSEMARY in *astonishment*

WILLIAM (*to HELEN*) Y'know what's wrong with this is our horrible modern poverty of language It's sheer misery to feel such sudden hate and despair and yet be so inarticulate

HELEN I agree They'd feel ever so much better if they could let it rip

WILLIAM Then we'll let it rip for them We'll make an Elizabethan job of it Hold tight, girl! Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks

HELEN Rage, blow! You cataracts and "hurricanes——

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There is a roll of thunder and a black-out HELEN and WILLIAM exit PAUL and ROSEMARY come downstage Curtains close PAUL sits stool right and ROSEMARY on stool left There are now lightning flashes and thunder WILLIAM and HELEN enter from their respective alcoves with cloaks They come to centre on rostrum, the lightning and thunder stops and two blue spots come on them

HELEN (*in grand manner*)

Oh—that I should be tied to such a pudding bag
Of dreary Vanity and duller wit A thing
Made up of braces, collar studs and starch,
With hardly more red blood in it than drips
Out of the poor frozen joint from Argentine

WILLIAM Imagine a cat five feet four inches high,
Take away dignity and let it rage
With deep inferiority—and that's a wife

HELEN Why—hot-water bottles of the cheaper sort,
Bargains from Boots, bring me more comfort
Two and fourpence at the nearest Odeon
Bring more romance or cheerful entertainment

WILLIAM (*pointing to HELEN*)

You're Madame Nature's grim old conjuring trick
Every man's disappointment—girl into wife
I married a loving, ripe and merry lass,
To find myself keeping, at a rising cost,
A bitter woman who hates the sight of me

HELEN (*coming to centre and standing in front of WILLIAM*)

And why? Because I had a lover once
And now he's disappeared, and in his place,
For me to live with, are a costing clerk, a
Lecturer, a stomach and a thirst

HELEN *comes down to piano left WILLIAM comes down to piano right PAUL and ROSEMARY rise JOYCE and PHILIP rise*

HELEN (*pointing to WILLIAM*) Oh, hateful, pompous clown!

WILLIAM (*pointing to HELEN*) Oh, damned, malicious shrew!

ROSEMARY and PAUL *point at each other also JOYCE and PHILIP do the same, all bitterly quarrelling*

There is a crash of thunder and the lighting is held until the curtain has fallen

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

PHILIP and JOYCE begin playing and go on brilliantly for a minute or so Then he stops and, after a moment or so, she stops too

JOYCE (*annoyed, leaning on piano*) What's the matter, darling?

PHILIP Well, nobody's coming on or anything What happens now? You see, it's exactly what I said They can't make a third act out of it All the critics will say, "Not really a play at all, and even so it goes to pieces in the third act"

JOYCE Well, you're quite wrong (*Sits at piano again*) The third act's all right and it's starting now Listen!

Plays a few bars of pseudo-Oriental, mystical music

PHILIP What's that muck for? (*Pause*) Are they bringing on a bogus Oriental illusionist?

JOYCE (*as she plays softly*) No, this is the fortune-telling music Madame Aurora who's just returned from the East——

PHILIP Probably Clacton-on-Sea

JOYCE —to read palms and gaze into crystals.

PHILIP Rosemary's consulting her, I suppose?

JOYCE Yes (*Music stops*) She and Paul have now arrived at the third stage, when each feels the other is hopeless and is ready to be consoled by somebody else And so of course Rosemary's having her fortune told

PHILIP Using her husband's money to find out if there is any other chap on the way

JOYCE What a noble mind you have, maestro!

JOYCE commences to play again in which PHILIP joins her in a mocking manner and curtains open to disclose corner of Mme Aurora's sitting-room, with a few cheap pseudo-mystical decorations ROSEMARY in outdoor clothes sits at small table with crystal on it, opposite HELEN as Mme Aurora She wears Oriental shawl, with grey hair showing under it, probably large spectacles Music dies away

HELEN (*in thick common voice, looking at ROSEMARY's hand*) Yes, dear, I see you're married Two children——

ROSEMARY (*hastily*) One

HELEN (*quickly*) That's right, dear One I'm afraid you're not

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very happy Nothing like so happy as you thought you was going to be Of course, dear, your trouble is you're a lot more sensitive than people think—you're a very loving, sensitive nature, it's 'ere as plain as a pikestaff—an' what's the result? The result is people close to you 'urt your feelings when they 'ardly know they're doing it An' what else? You go an' trust people—for you've a trusting nature I can see that—an' then they go an' let you down Isn't that right?

ROSEMARY Yes, it is I can't imagine how you can see me so clearly

HELEN It's a gift, dear Very few 'ave it, an' even then it needs a lot of development (*Coughing*)

ROSEMARY Could you—tell me what's going to happen?

HELEN (*taking and staring at ROSEMARY's right hand*) I see a tall man coming over the sea with love for you in his 'eart You'll meet 'im soon, quite soon, an' he'll make you very 'appy I see a journey—and a strange bed

ROSEMARY What sort of strange bed? (*Withdraws her hand*)

HELEN (*darkly*) Never you mind about that, dear (*With marked change of manner*) And that'll be seven-and-sixpence, thank you, Mrs—er—

ROSEMARY (*hastily*) Oh yes—of course (*Rises and exits right*) Thank you so much Good morning

HELEN (*rising as ROSEMARY goes*) Good morning

Curtains close PHILIP with one hand plays quick harsh music

PHILIP (*pleased with himself*) Not bad, eh? Taxis Street scene

JOYCE What about this? (*Plays a heavy thumping tune in march time*)

PHILIP Now what's that?

JOYCE Major Spanner on the way

PHILIP Who's Major Spanner?

JOYCE (*loudly and cheerfully*) He was the wedding guest, you remember, who'd known her for a long time and didn't think Paul good enough for her An awful chump, if you ask me, but nearly every woman's got one of these faithful hounds tucked away somewhere Keep the street music going

As he does, ROSEMARY enters She goes to centre below rostrum, looks at her watch, then glances at the space above footlights as if it were a shop window, catches sight of something that interests her, tries it on, so to speak, then rejects it and is just turning away, giving another glance at her watch, when WILLIAM enters as Major George Spanner, bronzed and trim, just back from the East. He

suddenly recognises ROSEMARY with delight They talk in front of the imaginary window through which we see them

WILLIAM (*with enthusiasm*) Why—Rosemary

Music stops

ROSEMARY (*almost equally pleased*) George Spanner! How nice to see you again!

WILLIAM Wonderful to run into you like this! Just goin' to ring you up, matter of fact

ROSEMARY (*with mock severity*) You haven't been back ages and never told me?

WILLIAM Of course not, my dear Rosemary I only got in last night

ROSEMARY You didn't come to England at all, did you, on your last leave?

WILLIAM No Haven't been here since your marriage—you remember?

ROSEMARY Yes And I've missed you, George

WILLIAM Ho, ho! Like to believe that, but sounds a bit steep I mean, young married woman and all that

ROSEMARY But you're one of my very oldest friends, George, and of course I've missed you

WILLIAM (*soldierly embarrassment*) Very decent of you to say so, Rosemary Of course, I've missed you no end Fact is, that's why I stayed out East last leave Felt I couldn't face it here with you—well—er—tied up elsewhere sort of thing

ROSEMARY George, is that true?

WILLIAM Word of honour I shouldn't have mentioned it, of course Your fault it slipped out Let's forget it

ROSEMARY (*smiling at him*) But I don't want to forget it

WILLIAM Look here I suppose you're busy and crowded with engagements, eh? No chance of joining me in a spot of lunch, eh?

ROSEMARY I'd love to

WILLIAM (*as they begin to move away to left, takes ROSEMARY's arm*) Good show! Now look here, I'm out of touch, and you know all the places Where do you suggest we go?

Exit alcove left As they move away, PHILIP supplies a little more street music This dies down when they have gone HELEN enters She is wearing a Mrs de Folyat day dress but not the wig or make-up

JOYCE I'm sorry, Helen, but I think that outfit's all wrong for you.

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HELEN (*speaking to JOYCE*) It's not meant for me This outfit is for Mrs de Folyat—you know, the rich widow who talked to Major Spanner in the wedding reception scene She's given Paul another commission, after leaving him alone for several years, and now she's getting her claws into him Paul and Rosemary are in the third stage now, you know

JOYCE Yes, I know But what's she after, this Mrs de Folyat?

HELEN Anything she can get, I think But nothing very serious If she can detach an attractive man from his wife and keep him playing around and coming to her for sympathy, she's quite happy A sort of collector

JOYCE I know And how I hate 'em!

HELEN Yes, but men often like them

JOYCE Men'll like *anything*

PHILIP And so will women

HELEN I must see how the Spanner affair is progressing (*Goes up on rostrum Looks through curtains, addresses JOYCE*) Yes, yes I think at any minute now she may throw a biscuit or a bone at his doglike devotion

Curtains open to disclose corner of restaurant Table for two at end of meal, just when cigarettes are lighted ROSEMARY and WILLIAM sit each half-facing audience, the table having corner, not side, to front

WILLIAM (*who has had a good meal, holding photo frame*) Yes, this photograph you once gave me—you remember it, eh?

ROSEMARY Yes, but that was ages ago I'd only just left school You don't mean to say *that's* the photograph—

WILLIAM Yes, it is Had this neat little folding—er—frame arrangement made for it, and taken it everywhere Been in some dashed queer places (*puts photograph in his back pocket*), I can tell you

ROSEMARY But, George, that's terribly touching I'd no idea—

WILLIAM No, no, of course not I couldn't expect you to have But—er—well, I don't mind telling you now, Rosemary, it was quite a blow—had to take it right on the chin—when I came home last time and found you'd just got engaged to Weybridge (*Pause*) Because I had made up my mind to ask you!—Because I was going to say something pretty fierce to you myself

ROSEMARY (*softly*) I'm sorry, George (*Pause Puts out a hand and he pats it enthusiastically*) Go on Tell me some more

WILLIAM (*pats her hand again, more heavily*) Isn't much to tell, really Except this Shouldn't have said anything now if I'd known

you were happy But now I know you're not, it's different (*Pause Fiercely, leaning back in chair*) Good God, a wonderful little girl like you not being happy!

ROSEMARY (*half-laughing*) But you're forgetting I'm not a little girl and haven't been for years Not only am I married but I'm a mother—nearly a matron

WILLIAM Nonsense! To me you're a little girl—(*pats her hand*)—my little girl

ROSEMARY Really, George (*pats his hand*), I believe you've been taking a course of something You say all the nice things I want to hear

WILLIAM (*taking his hands from under hers, pats her hands again*) You won't like this, though it's got to be said You're not happy, are you? Weybridge doesn't realise what a lucky fella he is

ROSEMARY (*quietly, sincerely now*) It doesn't seem to be working, somehow

WILLIAM Queer thing At your wedding do, some fool of a woman—a friend of *his*, of course—told me what a clever fella the bridegroom was And I as good as told the woman there and then that in my opinion you were worth ten of him, ten of him (*Pause*) I've been uneasy in my mind ever since

ROSEMARY (*affectionately*) Poor George!

WILLIAM (*fatuously*) Well, that's something But—er—is that the best you can do?

ROSEMARY (*in half-comical whisper*) No

WILLIAM (*doglike devotion in his stare, takes her hand and kisses it*) A wonderful little girl

Curtains close HELEN enters wearing no hat and a light coat or something to suggest outdoors PHILIP plays some music

HELEN (*near entrance, calling*) Here I am, Paul

PAUL *enters in ordinary lounge suit without hat or overcoat He carries a note-book with him It is essential she should look a rich, attractive woman*

HELEN Now then, this is what I mean Would it be possible to enlarge the wing that way? No, you can't see it properly from here This is better (*Takes his arm and leads him a few paces, keeping her hand inside his arm*) Now you see what I mean?

PAUL Yes, it could be done

HELEN Mind you, Paul, I wouldn't *dream* of letting anybody but you lay a *finger* on the house You do understand that, don't you?

PAUL. Yes. That's very good of you. •

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HELEN (*turning so they face each other*) Paul—don't be so *professional*

PAUL (*smiling*) Sorry, Frances But you see, it was a professional question you were asking me

HELEN Oh—but I can't divide relationships into compartments like that Don't forget (*moves closer and smiles seductively at him*) I'm a woman

PAUL (*smilingly*) I'm not likely to forget that, my dear Frances (*In mock whisper*) In fact, if I didn't think there were at least a couple of your housemaids watching us through a bedroom window, I'd probably behave—this very moment—very unprofessionally indeed

HELEN You talk as if architects could be struck off the register, like doctors

PAUL Oh—no, we can be trusted If you don't make it too hard for us

HELEN (*with change of attack*) Paul, I think you're looking tired

PAUL I have been rather hard at it lately

HELEN Of course A man in your position and with your genius has to *give and give* We all understand that But it's obvious that wife of yours isn't looking after you at all

PAUL Well, as you know, we don't get on—and of course, now she isn't very much interested in my welfare

HELEN (*with fine show of indignation*) Paul, I think it's *monstrous!* To have no *intellectual* companionship, no deep store of sympathy, at home—that's bad enough—in fact, for a man of your kind it's the worst thing of all—but on top of that simply to neglect the most obvious duties a woman has towards a man—oh!—

PAUL (*uncomfortably*) Well—there it is (*About to change the subject*) Do you think you'd like—?

HELEN (*breaking in, impressively*) Paul, I think I ought to meet your wife Remember I haven't seen her since your wedding and don't know her at all You ought to bring us together

PAUL (*alarmed*) I don't think that would work very well, would it?

HELEN My dear Please remember I'm a sensible woman of the world—and don't get into a silly masculine panic. There won't be any scenes I'm a client—we've something to talk over—so you ask me to your house. (*Taking his arm again.*)

PAUL All right, only don't blame me if you don't enjoy yourself.

HELEN Of course, I'll enjoy myself Better make it lunch, though,

not dinner Just the three of us I'll look at my book and see if we can fix a date

They go out the way they came in JOYCE plays a few harsh chords

PHILIP What on earth is that?

JOYCE (*grimly*) Just a brief sketch of the music for that lunch

PHILIP Is it going to be like that?

JOYCE It'll be worse than that

Enter WILLIAM as himself

WILLIAM Getting a bit tired of Major Spanner Not a character that gives a fellow much scope Where's Helen? Still doing Mrs What's-her-name?

PHILIP Yes Mrs de Folyat wants to meet Rosemary, so Paul's got to arrange a lunch

JOYCE If he'd any sense, of course, he'd have refused The two women'll sit there, hating each other, and he'll be wretched However, I like this third stage, with philandering just round the corner I'm getting quite interested now

WILLIAM (*addressing audience*) Not enough comment now, in my opinion It's rapidly degenerating into ordinary theatrical muck

PHILIP That's what she likes

JOYCE It's what everybody likes Let's see how they're getting on at that lunch

WILLIAM I'm against it Leave 'em alone

JOYCE Just have a peep

WILLIAM jumps up on rostrum and stealthily peeps through curtains into inner scene, then comes away

How's it going?

WILLIAM (*sombrely*) Light thickens and the crow makes wing to the rocky wood

PHILIP Hamlet?

WILLIAM Macbeth And it's extraordinary—the way Shakespeare—

JOYCE (*impatiently breaking in*) Oh, never mind about Shakespeare now—I want to see what's happening at that lunch It'll be over soon

WILLIAM Over now, I think

WILLIAM exits Curtains open and show corner of dining-room.

HELEN is just going PAUL is in centre standing ROSEMARY and HELEN both have their backs to each other

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HELEN (*with false gush*) Thank you so much, Mrs Weybridge
It's been such a pleasure coming here and meeting you, especially
after I've heard so much about you from your clever, clever husband

ROSEMARY (*with obvious false geniality*) Awfully good of you to
come, Mrs de Folyat I hope you'll come and dine with us sometime

HELEN That would be lovely

PAUL I'll see you down to your car (*crossing after her to left*) and
then I must get back to the office 'Bye, darling

Follows HELEN out

ROSEMARY 'Bye, darling

ROSEMARY *watches them go*

Of all the false, faked-up, smarmy, poisonous man-hunters! It
wouldn't be so bad if he'd found himself a *decent* woman

PHILIP (*turning to JOYCE*) You women always say that, don't
you?

JOYCE Yes We do——

ROSEMARY *has now gone to telephone and is dialling*

ROSEMARY Is that the Sahibs Club? Is Major Spanner there,
please?

*Curtains close PHILIP is playing de Folyat music JOYCE comes
in with the Spanner tune*

PHILIP Don't come in with that awful Major Spanner tune now
I'm playing the Mrs de Folyat music

JOYCE I know you are, dear But I don't particularly like the way
you are playing it

PHILIP I was playing it very well

JOYCE Rather too well, I thought I believe you are beginning to
take an interest in that frightful woman

PHILIP I am Very attractive type And probably cleverer than
she looks

WILLIAM *enters*

WILLIAM Well, I lay six to four against her

PHILIP I'll take you It's money for nothing Paul hasn't a chance
against that woman

WILLIAM Hasn't he? Well, I think she's going to learn that the
situation is not quite as simple as she imagines The relation between
a husband and wife, even though they may be quarrelling all the time,
is never simple, and I think we'll find that Mrs What's-her-name—
de Folyat—doesn't realise that and so plays the wrong card

JOYCE I am delighted to hear it

WILLIAM Well, let's see But give her every chance (*To pianists*)
Music, atmosphere

*Curtains open WILLIAM exits alcove PHILIP and JOYCE play
de Folyat music*

*Scene shows corner of Mrs de Folyat's sitting-room, similar to
ROSEMARY'S, but harder, brighter colours HELEN as Mrs de
Folyat, in loose, semi-evening gown, is seeing that the right drinks
—brandy, whisky, etc., are on low table and is all-expectant She
has a final glance at herself, and PAUL enters dressed as before
JOYCE leans on her piano HELEN, arranging flowers, turns to
meet him*

PAUL I came along as soon as I could I was kept at the office
until nearly nine

HELEN (*all solicitude*) Poor boy! But have you had anything
to eat?

PAUL Yes, I had a quick bite at the club on the way here

HELEN (*moving to table*) Drink then, eh? Whisky, brandy? This
brandy's supposed to be rather wonderful (*Pours out glass*) Let
me give you some And sit back and relax You poor boy, you must
be so tired

PAUL *relaxing, while she gives him a liberal helping of brandy*

HELEN There, darling! (*Coming to behind sofa with the glass*)

*Puts cushion behind PAUL As she stands near him, he takes
her hand and she immediately leans over and kisses him, then
fondles his face for a moment and lifts glass for him to drink She
sits centre of sofa*

PHILIP She knows her stuff all right

JOYCE (*sharply*) Sh—sh (*PHILIP stops playing*)

PHILIP *leans on his piano They now look very cosy and relaxed*

PAUL *sips his drink*

PAUL. You're perfectly right, Frances. This is a wonderful brandy

HELEN Well, my dear, I always take a little trouble and try and
get the best of everything I may not always look it, but, believe it
or not, I'm rather a clever woman

PAUL (*smiling, takes her hand*) You're a fascinating woman, and
that's even more important (*Kissing her hand.*)

HELEN *puts her head on PAUL's shoulder who is lying back with
his arm round her*

HELEN (*smiling at PAUL*) Well, we had our lunch.

PAUL (*not quite happily*) Yes, we had our lunch

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HELEN And of course, being a man, you loathed every minute of it, didn't you?

PAUL Yes, 'fraid I did

HELEN (*soothingly*) Never mind All over now But, of course, I had to see for myself

PAUL And what did you see? (*Into his glass*)

HELEN My dear! Why, of course, you're quite right

PAUL (*rather stiffly, lowering his glass*) What do you mean? About Rosemary?

HELEN Of course Everything you told me about her—as well as everything you meant to infer—was, of course, absolutely right She's completely wrong for you

PAUL (*tonelessly*) Yes (*Puts glass on floor left of sofa*) I suppose she is

HELEN But—I mean—I saw that in two minutes I can quite see how it all began, of course A nice, fresh, little thing But now, you're quite right You're growing all the time She can't develop In fact, like most women of her type, she's narrowing instead of broadening It's not even a matter of being really *aware*—of being shall we say—intellectual—but, of course, she's not even moderately intelligent In fact, let's admit it, she's *stupid*

PAUL (*who has liked this less and less*) You know, you really saw Rosemary at her worst to-day I mean, we've been having rows and so on—and then I think she spotted something

HELEN Oh—but then—as I say, it didn't take me two minutes to see She is *stupid*

PAUL (*angrily*) She isn't stupid

HELEN My dear Paul, there's no need to be cross merely because I'm agreeing with everything you've told me about her

PAUL (*sulkily*) I never said she was stupid

HELEN Not in so many words, perhaps It takes a woman to do that But you've told me she doesn't make an effort to understand you—she doesn't try to develop And now that I've seen her for myself I'm merely telling you in one word—why—because she's—

PAUL (*crossly*) Yes, yes, yes You said it before

HELEN Paul What's the matter?

PAUL (*turning to face her*) I suppose the matter—is that I don't enjoy listening to you sneering at my wife

HELEN (*annoyed herself now*) Sneering! When I'm only—

PAUL (*cutting in sharply*) I know You said that before too Well,

no doubt it's all very illogical, inconsistent and absurd, after the rot I've talked, but there it is—I *don't like it* (*With forced change of manner*) I'm sorry, Frances, I've had a long day and I'm probably rather tired I think I'd better go

HELEN (*cooling rapidly*) I think you had I also think you're behaving very stupidly

PAUL No doubt that's the trouble with us Weybridges—we're all stupid people Thank you for the brandy Good night

He hurries out Curtains close WILLIAM exits PAUL wearing light overcoat enters as if walking home We hear him muttering angrily to himself PAUL goes up on to rostrum Moonlight spot comes on

PAUL Damned cheek talking about my wife like that! Just damned cheek Rich, spoilt woman—say anything

PAUL *takes same position in moonlight spot as in Act One, then listens*

ROSEMARY (*voice off*) Darling the lilac

Chopin music as before PAUL hears it

ROSEMARY (*voice off*) Chopin perfect only three days
I love you

PAUL Rosemary!

Lights stay down but music soars as he hurries out Curtain draws on right alcove, where PAUL is discovered still in his rain-coat Holding telephone, he is speaking into it eagerly

PAUL Rosemary, listen, darling Oh, it's you, Nannie Could I speak to Mrs Weybridge, please Gone away, well, if there's a note you'd better read it to me Gone away for the week-end, perhaps longer, all right then, Nannie If she does ring up would you tell her I've gone away too, and I might be back on Monday, and I might not

Some music Curtain closes on alcove Fade-in ordinary lighting

PHILIP It's too bad she wasn't there, just when he was ready to make it up

JOYCE (*rising*) Doesn't surprise me, though That woman at lunch was the last straw, so she telephoned Major Spanner to take her away somewhere, for a nice little bit of consoling romance

PHILIP (*showing more interest and rising*) Oh—that's it, is it? They've taken to the road, have they, probably under a false name? Fun in a Tudor Trust House, eh? Though I have my doubts about the Major

THE PLAYS OF J B PRIESTLEY

JOYCE Oh, I don't know I'm beginning to fancy the Major, though I think he'd need a lot of training Not a week-end man at all

PHILIP The blatant cynicism of you women—ugh!

JOYCE (*indignantly*) And after the things I've heard you say—

Curtains open showing corner of private sitting-room in very Olde Worlde Inne ROSEMARY in day clothes is sitting on sofa, looking rather forlorn and dubious She sits still throughout outside dialogue

PHILIP There we are Ye Olde Tudor Inne with plaster beams

JOYCE And he's taken a private sitting-room with the best double bedroom adjoining it Well, well, well!

WILLIAM enters as Major Spanner, in dinner jacket PHILIP and JOYCE retire to pianos and sit Spanner has traces of a cold, which gets worse throughout the scene

ROSEMARY But, George, you've changed

WILLIAM (*startled*) Changed? Same man you've always known Loved you for years

ROSEMARY No, I mean your clothes

WILLIAM Oh yes Always like to change Make a habit of it Keeps a fella from getting slack, y'know

ROSEMARY (*half vexed, half laughing*) But we want to *be* slack That's why we've come here Besides I didn't bring any evening things with me

WILLIAM Oh—I see Look odd, will it?

ROSEMARY Of course it will We'll have to have dinner up here

WILLIAM (*rather disconcerted*) Oh—will we? Oh, I say, I've just commandeered a good table down there Slipped down for a short drink before feeding (*Sneezes, then sniffs a little*) Fact is, that bath-room's damned draughty and I didn't notice it in time Have to be careful after all these years in a hot climate

ROSEMARY (*vaguely*) Yes, of course Well, you'd better slip down again and tell them we'll dine up here.

WILLIAM You don't think it would look odd, do you? I mean, you know what these people are (*Pointing to the door*)

ROSEMARY (*rather impatiently*) Well, if you like you can dine down there by yourself and I'll just have something on a tray up here I'm not very hungry anyhow.

WILLIAM Oh, aren't you? Oh, I say, that's rather a shame Food here's pretty good, too. That's how I remembered the name of the place.

ROSEMARY I don't care I didn't come here for *food*

WILLIAM (*rather embarrassed at this*) No, of course not Neither did I, of course Happy, little girl?

ROSEMARY Yes, of course, darling I've been enjoying the lovely peace of it To be quiet—with peace all around—lovely

WILLIAM (*dubiously*) Yes, quite Mayn't last, though

ROSEMARY (*startled*) Why?

WILLIAM Got a big table all laid out down below (*leaning towards her*) and the head waiter told me it's for a crowd of Air Force blokes who make a night of it here every Friday Probably won't be much peace and quiet when those lads get started Ho—ho!

ROSEMARY Yes, but I didn't mean *that*

WILLIAM No, of course not Quite understand what you mean

ROSEMARY (*after pause, wistfully*) George, do you really love me?

WILLIAM Why, Rosemary, little girl, you know I do Haven't I carried that photograph of you with me everywhere for years? Got it here now, matter of fact (*Pats his back pocket*)

ROSEMARY You don't want it now because you've got me (*After staring at him speculatively*) You know, George, darling, I hope you realise that a photograph is one thing and a real live person is quite a different thing I mean, are you quite sure it's me—me myself—you really want?

WILLIAM Why of course, Rosemary darling I tell you, I've dreamed of this for years

ROSEMARY (*stifling all doubts*) Darling! (*Holding up her face*) Kiss me!

WILLIAM (*moving to her*) By Jove, yes Just a second (*Suddenly stops and turns away, then violently sneezes*) Oh—damn! Sorry! (*Sniffs and blows his nose hard*)

ROSEMARY (*not holding up her face now*) Have you got a cold?

WILLIAM (*annoyed and apologetic*) Yes Beginning to look like it Damn that bathroom! Felt a touch somewhere too, coming down in the car That's why I wanted the window closed, but you wouldn't hear of it

ROSEMARY (*rather coldly*) I'm sorry I didn't realise you were so susceptible to colds

WILLIAM Well, a fella can't be years in a hot climate and then come back to this cold, damp hole—without—— (*Just catches another sneeze, then sits on sofa and looks at her gravely*)

ROSEMARY (*after a pause*) What's the matter, George? Is it—something about us?

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WILLIAM (*solemnly*) Oh—no But I've just realised I didn't pack my little glass thing For the nose, y'know

ROSEMARY (*sadly*) No, George, I don't know

WILLIAM (*solemnly, sitting very close to her*) Sort of nasal douche, y'know Harley Street fella told me never to be without it here at home First sign of a cold you fill it with a solution of common salt and bicarbonate, then use it night and morning (*Goes through motions of douching*) Loosens and dissolves the mucus, he said

ROSEMARY (*in a tiny voice*) Did you say the mucus, George?

WILLIAM (*solemnly*) Yes, Rosemary And I've gone and forgotten the thing and it's too late now to buy one

ROSEMARY (*sadly*) Yes, George, it's too late now to buy one

He gives another violent sneeze, fiddles with his shirt cuff, takes out his handkerchief, mops his face, and now she suddenly bursts into a fit of hysterical laughter, rocking and sobbing with it while he sniffs and pats his nose and stares in amazement at her After several moments of this—

WILLIAM (*puzzled*) Look here, are you laughing or crying?

ROSEMARY Both! Both! (*Rising with decision*) Listen, George, do you know what we're going to do?

WILLIAM (*surprised sniffing*) Well, yes, I suppose—

ROSEMARY (*briskly*) No, you don't, so I'm going to tell you One of us is going to drive back to town to-night, *now*, and the other is taking the early train back in the morning Now, if you like you can stay here and enjoy your cold and let me go back in the car now Or—

WILLIAM But—but—(*just stifling a sneeze*)—I mean to say—what—I thought we were—

ROSEMARY No, we're not, my dear I like you very very much, but all the rest of it is simply off My mistake And don't pretend not to be relieved because I know very well you are and not just because you've got a cold either And if we both stay we'll only quarrel and feel silly afterwards Now, do I go back in the car to-night or do you?

WILLIAM Well—if it's all the same to you—I think I'd like to get back—because if my cold—

ROSEMARY I know—your little nose thing That's settled then Run down and get something to eat and I'll pack for you Go on, there's a lamb (*As she almost bustles him out*) And George! Remember! We've never been here It never happened. All a dream! Oh—what name did you put in the hotel register?

WILLIAM (*almost off, still trying to sneeze*) All I could think of was the name of an old C O of mine—terrible old stickler (*sneezes*) Smith

WILLIAM *goes out* ROSEMARY *sits on sofa, half-laughing, half-crying* Curtains close Bar or two of music with *Spanner* theme suggested

JOYCE All he wanted was to go on with his nice, safe little doglike devotion A photograph to wag his head over when he'd had a few drinks, and not a real woman

PHILIP He's probably got two or three little brown wives in Banji-Banji But I thought that bogus romantic devotion was just what you women wanted

JOYCE Not at all

HELEN *enters through curtains and comes to centre of rostrum*

HELEN What we women want is something quite simple, and it's you men who make it all seem complicated What we want is simply to be intensely real living people to the men we love Nothing fancy at all—we get over that a year after we've left school—not strange, romantic, glamorous figures—but just attractive and desirable *real people* And your trouble is, whether you're romantics, sensualists, Don Quixotes, Don Juans, it's all the same—you won't let us be real people You'll turn us into anything, dolls, goddesses, drudges, symbols, phantoms, rather than recognise us as our simple selves And that's the honest truth

Lights are now fading Curtain on alcove left draws, showing

ROSEMARY *telephoning like PAUL in the previous scene* JOYCE *plays*

ROSEMARY (*at telephone*) Oh, Nannie, is Mr Weybridge there?
I see All right, Nannie

She begins dialling savagely to the sound of staccato music, playing stops

Is that Fletcher, Fletcher and Coulson Is Mr Coulson there, please?
Mrs Weybridge Say it's rather important Oh, Mr Coulson, could I see you as soon as possible? Well, it is, really Well, it's—it's—(*hurriedly, but rather louder*)—it's about a divorce—

Music starts a little mournful Close of curtain alcove left

HELEN And there you are That separated them

Playing stops

JOYCE It's just the sort of dam' silly thing that would

PHILIP No doubt But may I point out one important fact? If she hadn't been in such a hurry to ring up that solicitor—

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JOYCE (*cutting in*) Yes, yes, we know But she felt she had to do something I understand exactly how she felt

PHILIP There you are You women——

HELEN (*cutting in*) Yes, we'll admit it's when we feel thoroughly upset, we *are* inclined to do the first thing that comes into our heads

JOYCE Oh Lord—yes!

PHILIP Quite so Whereas—if you'd only take it easy, just turn things over, enjoy a little quiet reflection——

JOYCE (*cutting in*) You've been taking it easy, turning things over, and enjoying your little quiet reflection ever since I've known you

PHILIP I prefer to ignore that type of remark

JOYCE (*mocking his tone*) He prefers to ignore that type of remark

PHILIP (*annoyed*) Oh—shut up!

HELEN Hoy, hoy! It's not you two we're doing but Paul and Rosemary Now of course, it was months—and horribly dreary months—before they found themselves together in the solicitor's office

JOYCE Yes, it would be But don't show us any of those dreary months

WILLIAM *now enters as himself*

WILLIAM No, no, we can imagine (*Sits on rostrum*)

HELEN In any case, they ought to be back in that solicitor's office by now Joyce—Philip

HELEN *joins WILLIAM* *Curtains open to reveal exactly the same solicitor's office scene as in Act One* PAUL *moves about as before* ROSEMARY's voice is heard off, as before, saying "Oh, in here Thank you!" and she enters as before, wearing the same clothes PAUL is looking out of window and turns She stares at PAUL He looks embarrassed All as before

PAUL (*with an effort*) I'm afraid this is—er—rather embarrassing —Rosemary

ROSEMARY (*with similar effort*) Yes—Paul—I'm afraid it is .
(*Sits and looks away*)

PAUL Not my fault . I had a note from Coulson asking me to be here at half-past three—to answer some questions about the—the divorce .

ROSEMARY (*tiny voice*) Yes, so had I

PAUL (*restlessly*) Oh, I say—monstrous thing for Coulson to do —asking us both here at the same time Shows you how blankly insensitive these lawyers are Typical lawyer's trick, this Damn Coulson!

ROSEMARY (*faintly*) Oh—I don't think—it's perhaps— (*Dies away*)

PAUL What?

ROSEMARY No—nothing

PAUL Look here I'll go and wait out there

ROSEMARY No—it

PAUL Don't mind a bit

They stare at each other uncertainly and miserably Lights on inner stage and pianos and fore-stage now begin to fade JOYCE rises from piano and begins to move towards back PHILIP does same

JOYCE It's just as it was before In another minute he'll go out, and that poor girl will start crying——

PHILIP And if we're not careful, we'll find ourselves arguing about it as before, and then we'll be shown how they first met, and it'll all go round and round

JOYCE It's not good enough

PAUL (*quietly but indignantly*) I couldn't agree with you more

ROSEMARY (*rising, same tone as PAUL*) It's really Helen's fault—and William's——

PHILIP (*voice beginning to fade*) Well, my dear, let them settle it
Moves to right alcove, and exits

JOYCE (*voice fading*) And themselves—if they can

She exits from alcove left Curtains close WILLIAM and HELEN are now lit as if in firelight, with the rest of the stage dark HELEN speaks quietly, as if concluding a long story

HELEN So there they were Paul, like a fool, went out, and poor Rosemary sat there crying Of course, she'd asked the solicitor to send for them both at the same time, in the hope that seeing her again he might have discovered he was still in love with her (*Pause*) William, are you listening?

WILLIAM Yes, I'm listening But I'm thinking too

HELEN No doubt But I don't believe you were listening

WILLIAM Yes, I was The last thing you said was that she hoped he was still in love with her Well, he is. And he's only got to run into her anywhere outside that solicitor's office, and he'll show her he is

HELEN I'll tell her about that. Then she'll make sure he does run into her But what were you thinking about—those two?

WILLIAM No About two other people

HELEN (*who knows at once*) Oh!

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WILLIAM (*slowly*) Two people—rather older and more mature—and perhaps cleverer in some ways—than those two, who also fell in love, got married, and went galloping away to happiness—only, of course, to find the usual hurdles and jumps and obstacles—losing the first excitement of possession, disagreeing about friends

HELEN (*quietly*) Complaints about being taken for granted or neglected, and jealousy when other men and women were specially attentive—

WILLIAM (*quietly*) And then a whole fog of cross-purposes—

HELEN And each of them wearing their pride like blinkers—

WILLIAM And so, instead of clearing the hurdles and reaching the long flat stretch where they could canter home in trust and affection, they turned aside, they broke—they got divorced

HELEN (*with controlled emotion*) One of them—didn't seem to mind very much—behaved as if it were true what he'd said when—when they were quarrelling—that marriage wasn't right for him—

WILLIAM He was a fool—and a liar But he didn't know enough then And those were the silly easy days when people were busy deceiving themselves Now he knows that life is hard, and the years are slipping by, and soon the nights will be longer and lonelier and friends will vanish and where there might have been love to the end, not excitement and passion and possession, not rockets and stars but the steady glow of the fire, there will be darkness—and nothing (*Pause*) She can't understand that yet

HELEN (*half-laughing, half-crying*) Oh, can't she? You ask any woman living alone!

WILLIAM But she needn't live alone

HELEN She prefers to

WILLIAM (*pause, turning to HELEN*) I'm giving myself a last chance, Helen

HELEN Why do you say that?

WILLIAM Because—this being friends, all so gay and matey and cool—doesn't work any longer for me I've tried hard but I can't make it work So if this is all, I'm going away

HELEN (*hastily*) You're not going without me

WILLIAM (*joyfully*) Helen! (*Turning to her*)

HELEN No, wait, William. I agree with everything you've said, and I've felt it too But it's not good enough. I'm a woman—and not an insurance against a lonely old age Say it—or never talk like this again

WILLIAM (*with great sincerity. Pause*) My dear, I love you—I love

you with all my heart—and I ask you to forgive me—and marry me again——

HELEN Oh—my darling—there's nothing to forgive—and I love you too—and, of course, I will——

— They embrace, and then after a moment she withdraws and looks at him, half laughing, half crying

But darling, making all that fuss and getting divorced—and then marrying again—they'll say we don't know our own minds——

WILLIAM (*sturdily*) Well, we do

HELEN (*same tone as before*) They'll laugh at us

WILLIAM (*roundly*) Let 'em laugh

They rise. Curtains open on inner stage. Great burst of laughter from all four on inner stage, with all lights coming on full—showing a back wall of drawing-room and a buffet table, with drinks, food, and the four—PAUL, ROSEMARY, who are now in evening dress standing in front of it. The side curtains of alcoves are also drawn aside to show flowers or lighted decorations. The laughter is friendly and not at all malicious

PAUL Well, you're a bright pair. Ask us here to celebrate with you—and then go off into a corner

He gives WILLIAM a glass, PHILIP hands glass to HELEN

WILLIAM (*grinning*) Sorry, old boy!

ROSEMARY And you haven't even congratulated Joyce and Philip

HELEN (*to PHILIP*) I hope you'll be very happy, Philip. I'm sure you will

PHILIP Thank you, Helen. I had to do something to make her play in tune

WILLIAM (*after drinking*) I don't know that in the long run marriage makes anybody very happy. But then the single life doesn't make anybody very happy either. The fact is, nobody in his senses can be happy

HELEN Don't start philosophising now

WILLIAM No, my love. (*To JOYCE*) My congratulations, Joyce!

JOYCE Thank you, William! I'm so tired of seeing him look bleary-eyed that I decided I'd better marry him to try and clean him up

WILLIAM (*sternly*) For that, get back to your piano

JOYCE comes down to piano left

HELEN (*to PHILIP*) And you to yours

PHILIP comes down to piano right. They all have drinks now

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ROSEMARY (*holding up glass*) Well, here's to all of us!

JOYCE, PHILIP and PAUL Well, here's to all of us

They all toast each other and drink, the three couples look and smile at each other

WILLIAM Mind you, the sexual life, as even Shelley had to admit, is a cheat

JOYCE (*sardonically*) Are you telling me?

WILLIAM (*munching away at a sandwich which ROSEMARY has handed him*) It's been a cheat ever since Paradise

PHILIP It has

HELEN It takes us women in, just as it does you men

ROSEMARY Worse, I suspect

WILLIAM (*broadly now*) But to share the cheat together—with humour and kindness—

HELEN (*smiling at him*) With trust and deepening affection—

WILLIAM Is to put up a tent not too far from the shining gates

ROSEMARY That's true And I only hope you'll all be as happy as Paul and I have always been

PHILIP and WILLIAM *take a drink*

PAUL (*too heartily*) Well, I suppose we've been extraordinarily lucky—but there it is—never even a really serious misunderstanding

ROSEMARY (*sweetly*) We said from the first we'd take care never to quarrel—

HELEN Well, I must say, my dears

WILLIAM (*to HELEN with irony*) I don't think we can do better than follow their wonderful example

At this PHILIP and JOYCE sit at their pianos and begin playing, while HELEN and WILLIAM toast each other and move up on to the rostrum to meet PAUL and ROSEMARY

END OF PLAY